




PROPHETS AND KINGS

Volume 2

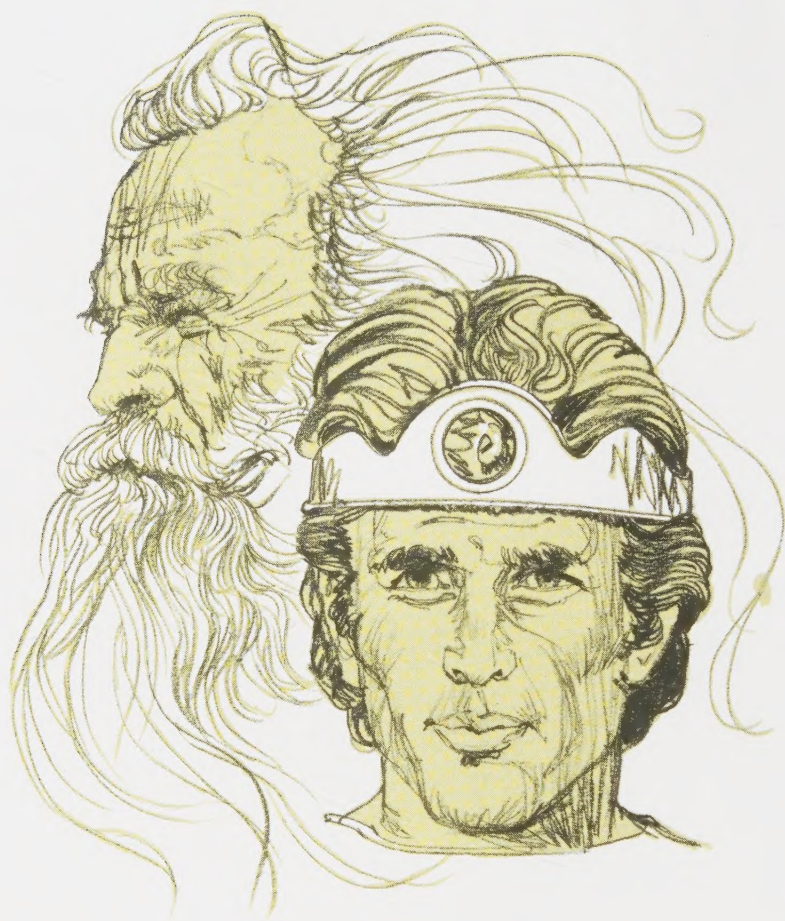






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The Story of Prophets and Kings



Spot Illustrations by James L. Converse

T H E S T O R Y O F

PROPHETS

A N D

KINGS

*As Illustrated in the Captivity and
Restoration of Israel*

by E. G. WHITE

*Author of Patriarchs and Prophets
Desire of Ages
The Acts of the Apostles
The Triumph of God's Love*

Volume 2

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chapter 33

The Book of the Law

THE silent yet powerful influences set in operation by the messages of the prophets regarding the Babylonian Captivity did much to prepare the way for a reformation that took place in the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign. This reform movement, by which threatened judgments were averted for a season, was brought about in a wholly unexpected manner through the discovery and study of a portion of Holy Scripture that for many years had been strangely misplaced and lost.

Nearly a century before, during the first Passover celebrated by Hezekiah, provision had been made for the daily public reading of the book of the law to the people by teaching priests. It was the observance of the statutes recorded by Moses, especially those given in the book of the covenant, which forms a part of Deuteronomy, that had made the reign of Hezekiah so prosperous. But Manasseh had dared set aside these statutes; and during his reign the temple copy of the

When the book of the law was read before King Josiah, he was deeply stirred. He was startled by warnings of judgment.

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JOHN STEEL, ARTIST

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book of the law, through careless neglect, had become lost. Thus for many years the people generally were deprived of its instruction.

The long-lost manuscript was found in the temple by Hilkiah, the high priest, while the building was undergoing extensive repairs in harmony with King Josiah's plan for the preservation of the sacred structure. The high priest handed the precious volume to Shaphan, a learned scribe, who read it and then took it to the king with the story of its discovery.

Josiah was deeply stirred as he heard read for the first time the exhortations and warnings recorded in this ancient manuscript. Never before had he realized so fully the plainness with which God had set before Israel "life and death, blessing and cursing" (Deuteronomy 30:19); and how repeatedly they had been urged to choose the way of life, that they might become a praise in the earth, a blessing to all nations. "Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid," Israel had been exhorted through Moses; "for the Lord thy God, He it is that doth go with thee; He will not fail thee, nor forsake thee." Deuteronomy 31:6.

The book abounded in assurances of God's willingness to save to the uttermost those who should place their trust fully in Him. As He had wrought in their deliverance from Egyptian bondage, so would He work mightily in establishing them in the Land of Promise and in placing them at the head of the nations of earth.

The encouragements offered as the reward of obedience were accompanied by prophecies of judgments against the disobedient; and as the king heard the inspired words, he recognized, in the picture set before him, conditions that

were similar to those actually existing in his kingdom. In connection with these prophetic portrayals of departure from God, he was startled to find plain statements to the effect that the day of calamity would follow swiftly and that there would be no remedy. The language was plain; there could be no mistaking the meaning of the words. And at the close of the volume, in a summary of God's dealings with Israel and a rehearsal of the events of the future, these matters were made doubly plain. In the hearing of all Israel, Moses had declared:

"Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak;
 And hear, O earth, the words of my mouth.
 My doctrine shall drop as the rain,
 My speech shall distill as the dew,
 As the small rain upon the tender herb,
 And as the showers upon the grass:
 Because I will publish the name of the Lord:
 Ascribe ye greatness unto our God.
 He is the Rock, His work is perfect:
 For all His ways are judgment:
 A God of truth and without iniquity,
 Just and right is He."

Deuteronomy 32: 1-4.

"Remember the days of old,
 Consider the years of many generations:
 Ask thy father, and he will show thee;
 Thy elders, and they will tell thee.
 When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance,
 When He separated the sons of Adam,
 He set the bounds of the people
 According to the number of the children of Israel.
 For the Lord's portion is His people;
 Jacob is the lot of His inheritance.

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He found him in a desert land,
And in the waste howling wilderness;
He led him about, He instructed him,
He kept him as the apple of His eye."
Verses 7-10.

But Israel "forsook God which made him,
And lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation.
They provoked Him to jealousy with strange gods,
With abominations provoked they Him to anger.
They sacrificed unto devils, not to God;
To gods whom they knew not,
To new gods that came newly up,
Whom your fathers feared not.
Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful,
And hast forgotten God that formed thee.

"And when the Lord saw it, He abhorred them,
Because of the provoking of His sons, and of
His daughters.
And He said, I will hide My face from them,
I will see what their end shall be:
For they are a very froward generation,
Children in whom is no faith.
They have moved Me to jealousy with that which
is not God;
They have provoked Me to anger with their vanities:
And I will move them to jealousy with those which
are not a people;
I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation."

"I will heap mischiefs upon them;
I will spend Mine arrows upon them.
They shall be burnt with hunger, and devoured with
burning heat,
And with bitter destruction."

“For they are a nation void of counsel,
 Neither is there any understanding in them.
 O that they were wise, that they understood this,
 That they would consider their latter end!
 How should one chase a thousand,
 And two put ten thousand to flight,
 Except their rock had sold them,
 And the Lord had shut them up?
 For their rock is not as our Rock,
 Even our enemies themselves being judges.”

“Is not this laid up in store with Me,
 And sealed up among My treasures?
 To Me belongeth vengeance, and recompense;
 Their foot shall slide in due time:
 For the day of their calamity is at hand,
 And the things that shall come upon them make haste.”
 Verses 15-21, 23, 24, 28-31, 34, 35.

These and similar passages revealed to Josiah God's love for His people and His abhorrence of sin. As the king read the prophecies of swift judgment upon those who should persist in rebellion, he trembled for the future. The perversity of Judah had been great; what was to be the outcome of their continued apostasy?

In former years the king had not been indifferent to the prevailing idolatry. “In the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young,” he had consecrated himself fully to the service of God. Four years later, at the age of twenty, he had made an earnest effort to remove temptation from his subjects by purging “Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images.” “They brake down the altars of Baalim in his presence; and the images, that were on high above them, he cut

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down; and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images, he brake in pieces, and made dust of them, and strowed it upon the graves of them that had sacrificed unto them. And he burnt the bones of the priests upon their altars, and cleansed Judah and Jerusalem." 2 Chronicles 34:3-5.

Not content with doing thorough work in the land of Judah, the youthful ruler had extended his efforts to the portions of Palestine formerly occupied by the ten tribes of Israel, only a feeble remnant of which now remained. "So did he," the record reads, "in the cities of Manasseh, and Ephraim, and Simeon, even unto Naphtali." Not until he had traversed the length and breadth of this region of ruined homes, and "had broken down the altars and the groves, and had beaten the graven images into powder, and cut down all the idols throughout all the land of Israel," did he return to Jerusalem. Verses 6, 7.

Thus Josiah, from his earliest manhood, had endeavored to take advantage of his position as king to exalt the principles of God's holy law. And now, while Shaphan the scribe was



reading to him out of the book of the law, the king discerned in this volume a treasure of knowledge, a powerful ally, in the work of reform he so much desired to see wrought in the land. He resolved to walk in the light of its counsels, and also to do all in his power to acquaint his people with its teachings and to lead them, if possible, to cultivate reverence and love for the law of heaven.

But was it possible to bring about the needed reform? Israel had almost reached the limit of divine forbearance; soon God would arise to punish those who had brought dishonor upon His name. Already the anger of the Lord was kindled against the people. Overwhelmed with sorrow and dismay, Josiah rent his garments and bowed before God in agony of spirit, seeking pardon for the sins of an impenitent nation.

At that time the prophetess Huldah was living in Jerusalem, near the temple. The mind of the king, filled with anxious foreboding, reverted to her, and he determined to inquire of the Lord through this chosen messenger to learn, if possible, whether by any means within his power he might save erring Judah, now on the verge of ruin.

The gravity of the situation and the respect in which he held the prophetess led him to choose as his messengers to her the first men of the kingdom. "Go ye," he bade them, "inquire of the Lord for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found: for great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us." 2 Kings 22:13.

Through Huldah the Lord sent Josiah word that Jeru-

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saalem's ruin could not be averted. Even should the people now humble themselves before God, they could not escape their punishment. So long had their senses been deadened by wrongdoing that, if judgment should not come upon them, they would soon return to the same sinful course. "Tell the man that sent you to me," the prophetess declared, "Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the words of the book which the king of Judah hath read: because they have forsaken Me, and have burned incense unto other gods, that they might provoke Me to anger with all the works of their hands; therefore My wrath shall be kindled against this place, and shall not be quenched." Verses 15-17.

But because the king had humbled his heart before God, the Lord would acknowledge his promptness in seeking forgiveness and mercy. To him was sent the message: "Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the Lord, when thou heardest what I spake against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and hast rent thy clothes, and wept before Me; I also have heard thee, saith the Lord. Behold therefore, I will gather thee unto thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace; and thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place." Verses 19, 20.

The king must leave with God the events of the future; he could not alter the eternal decrees of Jehovah. But in announcing the retributive judgments of Heaven, the Lord had not withdrawn opportunity for repentance and reformation; and Josiah, discerning in this a willingness on the part

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of God to temper His judgments with mercy, determined to do all in his power to bring about decided reforms. He arranged at once for a great convocation, to which were invited the elders and magistrates in Jerusalem and Judah, together with the common people. These, with the priests and Levites, met the king in the court of the temple.

To this vast assembly the king himself read “all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the Lord.” 2 Kings 23:2. The royal reader was deeply affected, and he delivered his message with the pathos of a broken heart. His hearers were profoundly moved. The intensity of feeling revealed in the countenance of the king, the solemnity of the message itself, the warning of judgments impending—all these had their effect, and many determined to join with the king in seeking forgiveness.



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Josiah now proposed that those highest in authority unite with the people in solemnly covenanting before God to co-operate with one another in an effort to institute decided changes. "The king stood by a pillar, and made a covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord, and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes with all their heart and all their soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book." The response was more hearty than the king had dared hope for: "All the people stood to the covenant." Verse 3.

In the reformation that followed, the king turned his attention to the destruction of every vestige of idolatry that remained. So long had the inhabitants of the land followed the customs of the surrounding nations in bowing down to images of wood and stone, that it seemed almost beyond the power of man to remove every trace of these evils. But Josiah persevered in his effort to cleanse the land. Sternly he met idolatry by slaying "all the priests of the high places;" "moreover the workers with familiar spirits, and the wizards, and the images, and the idols, and all the abominations that were spied in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, did Josiah put away, that he might perform the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the Lord." Verses 20, 24.

In the days of the rending of the kingdom, centuries before, when Jeroboam the son of Nebat, in bold defiance of the God whom Israel had served, was endeavoring to turn the hearts of the people away from the services of the temple in Jerusalem to new forms of worship, he had set up an unconsecrated altar at Bethel. During the dedication of this

altar, where many in years to come were to be seduced into idolatrous practices, there had suddenly appeared a man of God from Judea, with words of condemnation for the sacrilegious proceedings. He had "cried against the altar," declaring:

"O altar, altar, thus saith the Lord; Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee." 1 Kings 13:2. This announcement had been accompanied by a sign that the word spoken was of the Lord.

Three centuries had passed. During the reformation wrought by Josiah, the king found himself in Bethel, where stood this ancient altar. The prophecy uttered so many years before in the presence of Jeroboam, was now to be literally fulfilled.

"The altar that was at Bethel, and the high place which Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, had made, both that altar and the high place he brake down, and burned the high place, and stamped it small to powder, and burned the grove.

"And as Josiah turned himself, he spied the sepulchers that were there in the mount, and sent, and took the bones out of the sepulchers, and burned them upon the altar, and polluted it, according to the word of the Lord which the man of God proclaimed, who proclaimed these words.

"Then he said, What title is that that I see? And the men of the city told him, It is the sepulcher of the man of God, which came from Judah, and proclaimed these things that thou hast done against the altar of Bethel. And he said, Let him alone; let no man move his bones. So they let his bones

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alone, with the bones of the prophet that came out of Samaria." 2 Kings 23:15-18.

On the southern slopes of Olivet, opposite the beautiful temple of Jehovah on Mount Moriah, were the shrines and images that had been placed there by Solomon to please his idolatrous wives. See 1 Kings 11:6-8. For upwards of three centuries the great, misshapen images had stood on the "Mount of Offense," mute witnesses to the apostasy of Israel's wisest king. These, too, were removed and destroyed by Josiah.

The king sought further to establish the faith of Judah in the God of their fathers by holding a great Passover feast, in harmony with the provisions made in the book of the law. Preparation was made by those having the sacred services in charge, and on the great day of the feast, offerings were freely made. "There was not holden such a Passover from the days of the judges that judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel, nor of the kings of Judah." 2 Kings 23:22. But the zeal of Josiah, acceptable though it was to God, could not atone for the sins of past generations; nor could the piety displayed by the king's followers effect a change of heart in many who stubbornly refused to turn from idolatry to the worship of the true God.

For more than a decade following the celebration of the Passover, Josiah continued to reign. At the age of thirty-nine he met death in battle with the forces of Egypt, "and was buried in one of the sepulchers of his fathers." "All Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah. And Jeremiah lamented for Josiah: and all the singing men and the singing women spake of Josiah in their lamentations to this day, and made them an ordinance in Israel: and, behold, they are written

in the lamentations.” 2 Chronicles 35:24, 25. Like unto Josiah “was there no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him. Notwithstanding the Lord turned not from the fierceness of His great wrath, . . . because of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked Him withal.” 2 Kings 23:25, 26. The time was rapidly approaching when Jerusalem was to be utterly destroyed and the inhabitants of the land carried captive to Babylon, there to learn the lessons they had refused to learn under circumstances more favorable.



chapter 34

Jeremiah

AMONG those who had hoped for a permanent spiritual revival as the result of the reformation under Josiah was Jeremiah, called of God to the prophetic office while still a youth, in the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign. A member of the Levitical priesthood, Jeremiah had been trained from childhood for holy service. In those happy years of preparation he little realized that he had been ordained from birth to be "a prophet unto the nations;" and when the divine call came, he was overwhelmed with a sense of his unworthiness. "Ah, Lord God!" he exclaimed, "behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child." Jeremiah 1:5, 6.

In the youthful Jeremiah, God saw one who would be true to his trust and who would stand for the right against great opposition. In childhood he had proved faithful; and now he was to endure hardness, as a good soldier of the cross. "Say not, I am a child," the Lord bade His chosen messenger; "for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever

For forty years the prophet Jeremiah stood before the nation as a faithful witness for truth and righteousness.

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I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee." "Gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee: be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them. For, behold, I have made thee this day a defended city, and an iron pillar, and brazen walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof, and against the people of the land. And they shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee, saith the Lord, to deliver thee." Verses 7, 8, 17-19.

For forty years Jeremiah was to stand before the nation as a witness for truth and righteousness. In a time of unparalleled apostasy he was to exemplify in life and character the worship of the only true God. During the terrible sieges of Jerusalem he was to be the mouthpiece of Jehovah. He was to predict the downfall of the house of David and the destruction of the beautiful temple built by Solomon. And when imprisoned because of his fearless utterances, he was still to speak plainly against sin in high places. Despised, hated, rejected of men, he was finally to witness the literal fulfillment of his own prophecies of impending doom, and share in the sorrow and woe that should follow the destruction of the fated city.

Yet amid the general ruin into which the nation was rapidly passing, Jeremiah was often permitted to look beyond the distressing scenes of the present to the glorious prospects of the future, when God's people should be ransomed from the land of the enemy and planted again in Zion. He foresaw the time when the Lord would renew His covenant relation-

ship with them. "Their soul shall be as a watered garden; and they shall not sorrow any more at all." Jeremiah 31:12.

Of his call to the prophetic mission, Jeremiah himself wrote: "The Lord put forth His hand, and touched my mouth. And the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have put My words in thy mouth. See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant." Jeremiah 1:9, 10.

Thank God for the words, "to build, and to plant." By these words Jeremiah was assured of the Lord's purpose to restore and to heal. Stern were the messages to be borne in the years that were to follow. Prophecies of swift-coming judgments were to be fearlessly delivered. From the plains of Shinar "an evil" was to "break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land." "I will utter My judgments against them," the Lord declared, "touching all their wickedness, who have forsaken Me." Verses 14, 16. Yet the prophet was to accompany these messages with assurances of forgiveness to all who should turn from their evil-doing.

As a wise master builder, Jeremiah at the very beginning of his lifework sought to encourage the men of Judah to lay the foundations of their spiritual life broad and deep, by making thorough work of repentance. Long had they been building with material likened by the apostle Paul to wood, hay, and stubble, and by Jeremiah himself to dross. "Refuse silver shall men call them," he declared of the impenitent nation, "because the Lord hath rejected them." Jeremiah 6:30, margin. Now they were urged to begin building wisely and for eternity, casting aside the rubbish of apostasy and

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unbelief, and using as foundation material the pure gold, the refined silver, the precious stones—faith and obedience and good works—which alone are acceptable in the sight of a holy God.

Through Jeremiah the word of the Lord to His people was: "Return, thou backsliding Israel, . . . and I will not cause Mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger forever. Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the Lord thy God. . . . Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord; for I am married unto you." "Thou shalt call Me, My Father; and shalt not turn away from Me." "Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings." Jeremiah 3:12-14, 19, 22.

And in addition to these wonderful pleadings, the Lord gave His erring people the very words with which they might turn to Him. They were to say: "Behold, we come unto Thee; for Thou art the Lord our God. Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains: truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel. . . . We lie down in our shame, and our confusion covereth us: for we have sinned against the Lord our God, we and our fathers, from our youth even unto this day, and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God." Verses 22-25.

The reformation under Josiah had cleansed the land of the idolatrous shrines, but the hearts of the multitude had not been transformed. The seeds of truth that had sprung up and given promise of an abundant harvest had been choked by thorns. Another such backsliding would be fatal; and the Lord sought to arouse the nation to a realization of their

danger. Only as they should prove loyal to Jehovah could they hope for the divine favor and for prosperity.

Jeremiah called their attention repeatedly to the counsels given in Deuteronomy. More than any other of the prophets, he emphasized the teachings of the Mosaic law and showed how these might bring the highest spiritual blessing to the nation and to every individual heart. "Ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein," he pleaded, "and ye shall find rest for your souls." Jeremiah 6:16.

On one occasion, by command of the Lord, the prophet took his position at one of the principal entrances to the city and there urged the importance of keeping holy the Sabbath day. The inhabitants of Jerusalem were in danger of losing sight of the sanctity of the Sabbath, and they were solemnly warned against following their secular pursuits on that day. A blessing was promised on condition of obedience. "If ye diligently hearken unto Me," the Lord declared, and "hallow the Sabbath day, to do no work therein; then shall there enter into the gates of this city kings and princes sitting upon the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they, and their princes, the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: and this city shall remain forever." Jeremiah 17:24, 25.

This promise of prosperity as the reward of allegiance was accompanied by a prophecy of the terrible judgments that would befall the city should its inhabitants prove disloyal to God and His law. If the admonitions to obey the Lord God of their fathers and to hallow His Sabbath day were not heeded, the city and its places would be utterly destroyed by fire.

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Thus the prophet stood firmly for the sound principles of right living so clearly outlined in the book of the law. But the conditions prevailing in the land of Judah were such that only by the most decided measures could a change for the better be brought about; therefore he labored most earnestly in behalf of the impenitent. "Break up your fallow ground," he pleaded, "and sow not among thorns." "O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved." Jeremiah 4:3, 14.

But by the great mass of the people the call to repentance and reformation was unheeded. Since the death of good King Josiah, those who ruled the nation had been proving untrue to their trust and had been leading many astray. Jehoahaz, deposed by the interference of the king of Egypt, had been followed by Jehoiakim, an older son of Josiah. From the beginning of Jehoiakim's reign, Jeremiah had little hope of saving his beloved land from destruction and the people from captivity. Yet he was not permitted to remain silent while utter ruin threatened the kingdom. Those who had remained loyal to God must be encouraged to persevere in right-doing, and sinners must, if possible, be induced to turn from iniquity.

The crisis demanded a public and far-reaching effort. Jeremiah was commanded by the Lord to stand in the court of the temple and speak to all the people of Judah who might pass in and out. From the messages given him he must diminish not a word, that sinners in Zion might have the fullest possible opportunity to hearken and to turn from their evil ways.

The prophet obeyed; he stood in the gate of the Lord's

house and there lifted his voice in warning and entreaty. Under the inspiration of the Almighty he declared:

“Hear the word of the Lord, all ye of Judah, that enter in at these gates to worship the Lord. Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, are these. For if ye thoroughly amend your ways and your doings; if ye thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbor; if ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt: then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, forever and ever.” Jeremiah 7:2-7.

The unwillingness of the Lord to chastise is here vividly shown. He stays His judgments that He may plead with the impenitent. He who exercises “loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth” yearns over His erring children; in every way possible He seeks to teach them the way of life everlasting. Jeremiah 9:24. He had brought the Israelites out of bondage that they might serve Him, the only true and living God. Though they had wandered long in idolatry and had slighted His warnings, yet He now declares His willingness to defer chastisement and grant yet another opportunity for repentance. He makes plain the fact that only by the most thorough heart reformation could the impending doom be averted. In vain would be the trust they might place in the temple and its services. Rites and ceremonies could not atone for sin. Notwithstanding their claim to be the chosen

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people of God, reformation of heart and of the life practice alone could save them from the inevitable result of continued transgression.

Thus it was that “in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem” the message of Jeremiah to Judah was, “Hear ye the words of this covenant,”—the plain precepts of Jehovah as recorded in the Sacred Scriptures,—“and do them.” Jeremiah 11:6. And this is the message he proclaimed as he stood in the temple courts in the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim.

Israel’s experience from the days of the Exodus was briefly reviewed. God’s covenant with them had been, “Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be My people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you.” Shamelessly and repeatedly had this covenant been broken. The chosen nation had “walked in the counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward.” Jeremiah 7:23, 24.

“Why,” the Lord inquired, “is this people of Jerusalem slidden back by a perpetual backsliding?” Jeremiah 8:5. In the language of the prophet it was because they had obeyed not the voice of the Lord their God and had refused to be corrected. See Jeremiah 5:3. “Truth is perished,” he mourned, “and is cut off from their mouth.” “The stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming; but My people know not the judgment of the Lord.” “Shall I not visit them for these things? saith the Lord: shall not My soul be avenged on such a nation as this?” Jeremiah 7:28; 8:7; 9:9.

The time had come for deep heart searching. While Josiah had been their ruler, the people had had some ground for hope. But no longer could he intercede in their behalf, for he had fallen in battle. The sins of the nation were such that the time for intercession had all but passed by. "Though Moses and Samuel stood before Me," the Lord declared, "yet My mind could not be toward this people: cast them out of My sight, and let them go forth. And it shall come to pass, if they say unto thee, Whither shall we go forth? then thou shalt tell them, Thus saith the Lord; Such as are for death, to death; and such as are for the sword, to the sword; and such as are for the famine, to the famine; and such as are for the captivity, to the captivity." Jeremiah 15:1, 2.

A refusal to heed the invitation of mercy that God was now offering would bring upon the impenitent nation the judgments that had befallen the northern kingdom of Israel over a century before. The message to them now was: "If ye will not hearken to Me, to walk in My law, which I have set before you, to hearken to the words of My servants the prophets, whom I sent unto you, both rising up early, and sending them, but ye have not hearkened; then will I make this house like Shiloh, and will make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth." Jeremiah 26:4-6.

Those who stood in the temple court listening to Jeremiah's discourse understood clearly this reference to Shiloh, and to the time in the days of Eli when the Philistines had overcome Israel and carried away the ark of the testament.

The sin of Eli had consisted in passing lightly over the iniquity of his sons in sacred office, and over the evils prevailing throughout the land. His neglect to correct these evils

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had brought upon Israel a fearful calamity. His sons had fallen in battle, Eli himself had lost his life, the ark of God had been taken from the land of Israel, thirty thousand of the people had been slain—and all because sin had been allowed to flourish unrebuked and unchecked. Israel had vainly thought that, notwithstanding their sinful practices, the presence of the ark would ensure them victory over the Philistines. In like manner, during the days of Jeremiah, the inhabitants of Judah were prone to believe that a strict observance of the divinely appointed services of the temple would preserve them from a just punishment for their wicked course.

What a lesson is this to men holding positions of responsibility today in the church of God! What a solemn warning to deal faithfully with wrongs that bring dishonor to the cause of truth! Let none who claim to be the depositaries of God's law flatter themselves that the regard they may outwardly show toward the commandments will preserve them from the exercise of divine justice. Let none refuse to be reproved for evil, nor charge the servants of God with being too zealous in endeavoring to cleanse the camp from evil-doing. A sin-hating God calls upon those who claim to keep His law to depart from all iniquity. A neglect to repent and to render willing obedience will bring upon men and women today as serious consequences as came upon ancient Israel. There is a limit beyond which the judgments of Jehovah can no longer be delayed. The desolation of Jerusalem in the days of Jeremiah is a solemn warning to modern Israel, that the counsels and admonitions given them through chosen instrumentalities cannot be disregarded with impunity.

Jeremiah's message to priests and people aroused the an-

tagonism of many. With boisterous denunciation they cried out, "Why hast thou prophesied in the name of the Lord, saying, This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate without an inhabitant? And all the people were gathered against Jeremiah in the house of the Lord." Jeremiah 26:9. Priests, false prophets, and people turned in wrath upon him who would not speak to them smooth things or prophesy deceit. Thus was the message of God despised, and His servant threatened with death.

Tidings of the words of Jeremiah were carried to the princes of Judah, and they hastened from the palace of the king to the temple, to learn for themselves the truth of the matter. "Then spake the priests and the prophets unto the princes and to all the people, saying, This man is worthy to die; for he hath prophesied against this city, as ye have heard with your ears." Verse 11. But Jeremiah stood boldly before the princes and the people, declaring: "The Lord sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city all the words that ye have heard. Therefore now amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the Lord your God; and the Lord will repent Him of the evil that He hath pronounced against you. As for me, behold, I am in your hand: do with me as seemeth good and meet unto you. But know ye for certain, that if ye put me to death, ye shall surely bring innocent blood upon yourselves, and upon this city, and upon the inhabitants thereof: for of a truth the Lord hath sent me unto you to speak all these words in your ears." Verses 12-15.

Had the prophet been intimidated by the threatening attitude of those high in authority, his message would have been

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without effect, and he would have lost his life; but the courage with which he delivered the solemn warning commanded the respect of the people and turned the princes of Israel in his favor. They reasoned with the priests and false prophets, showing them how unwise would be the extreme measures they advocated, and their words produced a reaction in the minds of the people. Thus God raised up defenders for His servant.

The elders also united in protesting against the decision of the priests regarding the fate of Jeremiah. They cited the case of Micah, who had prophesied judgments upon Jerusalem, saying, "Zion shall be plowed like a field, and Jerusa-



lem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of a forest." And they asked: "Did Hezekiah king of Judah and all Judah put him at all to death? did he not fear the Lord, and besought the Lord, and the Lord repented Him of the evil which He had pronounced against them? Thus might we procure great evil against our souls." Verses 18, 19.

Through the pleading of these men of influence the prophet's life was spared, although many of the priests and false prophets, unable to endure the condemning truths he uttered, would gladly have seen him put to death on the plea of sedition.

From the day of his call to the close of his ministry, Jeremiah stood before Judah as "a tower and a fortress" against which the wrath of man could not prevail. "They shall fight against thee," the Lord had forewarned His servant, "but they shall not prevail against thee: for I am with thee to save thee and to deliver thee, saith the Lord. And I will deliver thee out of the hand of the wicked, and I will redeem thee out of the hand of the terrible." Jeremiah 6:27; 15:20, 21.

Naturally of a timid and shrinking disposition, Jeremiah longed for the peace and quiet of a life of retirement, where he need not witness the continued impenitence of his beloved nation. His heart was wrung with anguish over the ruin wrought by sin. "O that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears," he mourned, "that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people! O that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of wayfaring men; that I might leave my people, and go from them." Jeremiah 9:1, 2.

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Cruel were the mockings he was called upon to endure. His sensitive soul was pierced through and through by the arrows of derision hurled at him by those who despised his messages and made light of his burden for their conversion. "I was a derision to all my people," he declared, "and their song all the day." "I am in derision daily, everyone mocketh me." "All my familiars watched for my halting, saying, Peradventure he will be enticed, and we shall prevail against him, and we shall take our revenge on him." Lamentations 3:14; Jeremiah 20:7, 10.

But the faithful prophet was daily strengthened to endure. "The Lord is with me as a mighty terrible One," he declared in faith; "therefore my persecutors shall stumble, and they shall not prevail: they shall be greatly ashamed; for they shall not prosper: their everlasting confusion shall never be forgotten." "Sing unto the Lord, praise ye the Lord: for He hath delivered the soul of the poor from the hand of evil-doers." Jeremiah 20:11, 13.

The experiences through which Jeremiah passed in the days of his youth and also in the later years of his ministry, taught him the lesson that "the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." He learned to pray, "O Lord, correct me, but with judgment; not in Thine anger, lest Thou bring me to nothing." Jeremiah 10:23, 24.

When called to drink of the cup of tribulation and sorrow, and when tempted in his misery to say, "My strength and my hope is perished from the Lord," he recalled the providences of God in his behalf and triumphantly exclaimed, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great

is Thy faithfulness. The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in Him. The Lord is good unto them that wait for Him, to the soul that seeketh Him. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord." Lamentations 3:18, 22-26.



chapter 35

Approaching Doom

THE first years of Jehoiakim's reign were filled with warnings of approaching doom. The word of the Lord spoken by the prophets was about to be fulfilled. The Assyrian power to the northward, long supreme, was no longer to rule the nations. Egypt on the south, in whose power the king of Judah was vainly placing his trust, was soon to receive a decided check. All unexpectedly a new world power, the Babylonian Empire, was rising to the eastward and swiftly overshadowing all other nations.

Within a few short years the king of Babylon was to be used as the instrument of God's wrath upon impenitent Judah. Again and again Jerusalem was to be invested and entered by the besieging armies of Nebuchadnezzar. Company after company—at first a few only, but later on thousands and tens of thousands—were to be taken captive to the land of Shinar, there to dwell in enforced exile. Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah—all these Jewish kings were in turn to become vassals of the Babylonian ruler, and all in turn were

When the roll containing Jeremiah's message from God was read to King Jehoiakim, he slashed it in pieces and burned it.

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to rebel. Severer and yet more severe chastisements were to be inflicted upon the rebellious nation, until at last the entire land was to become a desolation, Jerusalem was to be laid waste and burned with fire, the temple that Solomon had built was to be destroyed, and the kingdom of Judah was to fall, never again to occupy its former position among the nations of earth.

Those times of change, so fraught with peril to the Israelitish nation, were marked with many messages from Heaven through Jeremiah. Thus the Lord gave the children of Judah ample opportunity of freeing themselves from entangling alliances with Egypt, and of avoiding controversy with the rulers of Babylon. As the threatened danger came closer, he taught the people by means of a series of acted parables, hoping thus to arouse them to a sense of their obligation to God, and also to encourage them to maintain friendly relations with the Babylonian government.

To illustrate the importance of yielding implicit obedience to the requirements of God, Jeremiah gathered some Rechabites into one of the chambers of the temple and set wine before them, inviting them to drink. As was to have been expected, he met with remonstrance and absolute refusal. "We will drink no wine," the Rechabites firmly declared, "for Jonadab the son of Rechab our father commanded us, saying, Ye shall drink no wine, neither ye, nor your sons forever."

"Then came the word of the Lord unto Jeremiah, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Go and tell the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, Will ye not receive instruction to hearken to My words? saith the

Lord. The words of Jonadab the son of Rechab, that he commanded his sons not to drink wine, are performed; for unto this day they drink none, but obey their father's commandment." Jeremiah 35:6, 12-14.

God sought thus to bring into sharp contrast the obedience of the Rechabites with the disobedience and rebellion of His people. The Rechabites had obeyed the command of their father and now refused to be enticed into transgression. But the men of Judah had hearkened not to the words of the Lord, and were in consequence about to suffer His severest judgments.

"I have spoken unto you, rising early and speaking," the Lord declared, "but ye hearkened not unto Me. I have sent also unto you all My servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them, saying, Return ye now every man from his evil way, and amend your doings, and go not after other gods to serve them, and ye shall dwell in the land which I have given to you and to your fathers: but ye have not inclined your ear, nor hearkened unto Me. Because the sons of Jonadab the son of Rechab have performed the commandment of their father, which he commanded them; but this people hath not hearkened unto Me: therefore thus saith the Lord God of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will bring upon Judah and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem all the evil that I have pronounced against them: because I have spoken unto them, but they have not heard; and I have called unto them, but they have not answered." Verses 14-17.

When men's hearts are softened and subdued by the constraining influence of the Holy Spirit, they will give heed to counsel; but when they turn from admonition until their

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hearts become hardened, the Lord permits them to be led by other influences. Refusing the truth, they accept falsehood, which becomes a snare to their own destruction.

God had pleaded with Judah not to provoke Him to anger, but they had hearkened not. Finally sentence was pronounced against them. They were to be led away captive to Babylon. The Chaldeans were to be used as the instrument by which God would chastise His disobedient people. The sufferings of the men of Judah were to be in proportion to the light they had had and to the warnings they had despised and rejected. Long had God delayed His judgments, but now He would visit His displeasure upon them as a last effort to check them in their evil course.

Upon the house of the Rechabites was pronounced a continued blessing. The prophet declared, "Because ye have obeyed the commandment of Jonadab your father, and kept all his precepts, and done according unto all that he hath commanded you: therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before Me forever." Verses 18, 19. Thus God taught His people that faithfulness and obedience would be reflected back upon Judah in blessing, even as the Rechabites were blessed for obedience to their father's command.

The lesson is for us. If the requirements of a good and wise father, who took the best and most effectual means to secure his posterity against the evils of intemperance, were worthy of strict obedience, surely God's authority should be held in as much greater reverence as He is holier than man. Our Creator and our Commander, infinite in power, terrible in judgment, seeks by every means to bring men to

see and repent of their sins. By the mouth of His servants He predicts the dangers of disobedience; He sounds the note of warning and faithfully reproves sin. His people are kept in prosperity only by His mercy, through the vigilant watch-care of chosen instrumentalities. He cannot uphold and guard a people who reject His counsel and despise His reproofs. For a time He may withhold His retributive judgments; yet He cannot always stay His hand.

The children of Judah were numbered among those of whom God had declared, "Ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation." Exodus 19:6. Never did Jeremiah in his ministry lose sight of the vital importance of heart holiness in the varied relationships of life, and especially in the service of the most high God. Plainly he foresaw the downfall of the kingdom and a scattering of the inhabitants of Judah among the nations; but with the eye of faith he looked beyond all this to the times of restoration. Ringing in his ears was the divine promise: "I will gather the remnant of My flock out of all countries whither I have driven them, and will bring them again to their folds. . . . Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In His days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is His name whereby He shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS." Jeremiah 23:3-6.

Thus prophecies of oncoming judgment were mingled with promises of final and glorious deliverance. Those who should choose to make their peace with God and live holy lives amid the prevailing apostasy, would receive strength

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for every trial and be enabled to witness for Him with mighty power. And in the ages to come the deliverance wrought in their behalf would exceed in fame that wrought for the children of Israel at the time of the Exodus. The days were coming, the Lord declared through His prophet, when "they shall no more say, The Lord liveth, which brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; but, The Lord liveth, which brought up and which led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all countries whither I had driven them; and they shall dwell in their own land." Verses 7, 8. Such were the wonderful prophecies uttered by Jeremiah during the closing years of the history of the kingdom of Judah, when the Babylonians were coming unto universal rule, and were even then bringing their besieging armies against the walls of Zion.

Like sweetest music these promises of deliverance fell upon the ears of those who were steadfast in their worship of Jehovah. In the homes of the high and the lowly, where the counsels of a covenant-keeping God were still held in reverence, the words of the prophet were repeated again and again. Even the children were mightily stirred, and upon their young and receptive minds lasting impressions were made.

It was their conscientious observance of the commands of Holy Scripture, that in the days of Jeremiah's ministry brought to Daniel and his fellows opportunities to exalt the true God before the nations of earth. The instruction these Hebrew children had received in the homes of their parents, made them strong in faith and constant in their service of the living God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth.

When, early in the reign of Jehoiakim, Nebuchadnezzar for the first time besieged and captured Jerusalem, and carried away Daniel and his companions, with others specially chosen for service in the court of Babylon, the faith of the Hebrew captives was tried to the utmost. But those who had learned to place their trust in the promises of God found these all-sufficient in every experience through which they were called to pass during their sojourn in a strange land. The Scriptures proved to them a guide and a stay.

As an interpreter of the meaning of the judgments beginning to fall upon Judah, Jeremiah stood nobly in defense of the justice of God and of His merciful designs even in the severest chastisements. Untiringly the prophet labored. Desirous of reaching all classes, he extended the sphere of his influence beyond Jerusalem to the surrounding districts by frequent visits to various parts of the kingdom.

In his testimonies to the church, Jeremiah constantly referred to the teachings of the book of the law that had been so greatly honored and exalted during Josiah's reign. He emphasized anew the importance of maintaining a covenant relationship with the all-merciful and compassionate Being who upon the heights of Sinai had spoken the precepts of the Decalogue. Jeremiah's words of warning and entreaty reached every part of the kingdom, and all had opportunity to know the will of God concerning the nation.

The prophet made plain the fact that our heavenly Father allows His judgments to fall, "that the nations may know themselves to be but men." Psalm 9:20. "If ye walk contrary unto Me, and will not hearken unto Me," the Lord had forewarned His people, "I, even I, . . . will scatter you among

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the heathen, and will draw out a sword after you: and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste." Leviticus 26:21, 28, 33.

At the very time messages of impending doom were urged upon princes and people, their ruler, Jehoiakim, who should have been a wise spiritual leader, foremost in confession of sin and in reformation and good works, was spending his time in selfish pleasure. "I will build me a wide house and large chambers," he proposed; and this house, "ceiled with cedar, and painted with vermilion" (Jeremiah 22:14), was built with money and labor secured through fraud and oppression.

The wrath of the prophet was aroused, and he was inspired to pronounce judgment upon the faithless ruler. "Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by wrong," he declared; "that useth his neighbor's service without wages, and giveth him not for his work. . . . Shalt thou reign, because thou closest thyself in cedar? Did not thy father eat and drink, and do judgment and justice, and then it was well with him? He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well with him: was not this to know Me? saith the Lord. But thine eyes and thine heart are not but for thy covetousness, and for to shed innocent blood, and for oppression, and for violence, to do it.

"Therefore thus saith the Lord concerning Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah; They shall not lament for him, saying, Ah my brother! or, Ah sister! they shall not lament for him, saying, Ah lord! or, Ah his glory! He shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem." Verses 13-19.

Within a few years this terrible judgment was to be visited upon Jehoiakim; but first the Lord in mercy informed the impenitent nation of His set purpose. In the fourth year of Jehoiakim's reign "Jeremiah the prophet spake unto all the people of Judah, and to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem," pointing out that for over a score of years, "from the thirteenth year of Josiah, . . . even unto this day," he had borne witness of God's desire to save, but that his messages had been despised. Jeremiah 25:2, 3. And now the word of the Lord to them was:

"Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Because ye have not heard My words, behold, I will send and take all the families of the north, saith the Lord, and Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land, and against the inhabitants thereof, and against all these nations round about, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, and an hissing, and perpetual desolations. Moreover I will take from them the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones, and the light of the candle. And this whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years." Verses 8-11.

Although the sentence of doom had been clearly pronounced, its awful import could scarcely be understood by the multitudes who heard. That deeper impressions might be made, the Lord sought to illustrate the meaning of the words spoken. He bade Jeremiah liken the fate of the nation to the draining of a cup filled with the wine of divine wrath. Among the first to drink of this cup of woe was to be "Jerusa-

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lem, and the cities of Judah, and the kings thereof." Others were to partake of the same cup—"Pharaoh king of Egypt, and his servants, and his princes, and all his people," and many other nations of earth—until God's purpose should have been fulfilled. See Jeremiah 25.

To illustrate further the nature of the swift-coming judgments, the prophet was bidden to "take of the ancients of the people, and of the ancients of the priests; and go forth unto the valley of the son of Hinnom," and there, after reviewing the apostasy of Judah, he was to dash to pieces "a potter's earthen bottle," and declare in behalf of Jehovah, whose servant he was, "Even so will I break this people and this city, as one breaketh a potter's vessel, that cannot be made whole again."

The prophet did as he was commanded. Then, returning to the city, he stood in the court of the temple and declared in the hearing of all the people, "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will bring upon this city and upon all her towns all the evil that I have pronounced against it, because they have hardened their necks, that they might not hear My words." See Jeremiah 19.

The prophet's words, instead of leading to confession and repentance, aroused the anger of those high in authority, and as a consequence Jeremiah was deprived of his liberty. Imprisoned, and placed in the stocks, the prophet nevertheless continued to speak the messages of Heaven to those who stood by. His voice could not be silenced by persecution. The word of truth, he declared, "was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay." Jeremiah 20:9.

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It was about this time that the Lord commanded Jeremiah to commit to writing the messages he desired to bear to those for whose salvation his heart of pity was continually yearning. "Take thee a roll of a book," the Lord bade His servant, "and write therein all the words that I have spoken unto thee against Israel, and against Judah, and against all the nations, from the day I spake unto thee, from the days of Josiah, even unto this day. It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the evil which I purpose to do unto them; that they may return every man from his evil way; that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin." Jeremiah 36:2, 3.

In obedience to this command, Jeremiah called to his aid a faithful friend, Baruch the scribe, and dictated "all the words of the Lord, which He had spoken unto him." Verse 4. These were carefully written out on a roll of parchment and constituted a solemn reproof for sin, a warning of the sure result of continual apostasy, and an earnest appeal for the renunciation of all evil.

When the writing was completed, Jeremiah, who was still



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a prisoner, sent Baruch to read the roll to the multitudes who were assembling at the temple on the occasion of a national fast day, "in the fifth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, in the ninth month." "It may be," the prophet said, "they will present their supplication before the Lord, and will return everyone from his evil way: for great is the anger and the fury that the Lord hath pronounced against this people." Verses 9, 7.

Baruch obeyed, and the roll was read before all the people of Judah. Afterward the scribe was summoned before the princes to read the words to them. They listened with great interest and promised to inform the king concerning all they had heard, but counseled the scribe to hide himself, for they feared the king would reject the testimony and seek to slay those who had prepared and delivered the message.

When King Jehoiakim was told by the princes what Baruch had read, he immediately ordered the roll brought before him and read in his hearing. One of the royal attendants, Jehudi by name, fetched the roll and began reading the words of reproof and warning. It was the time of winter, and the king and his companions of state, the princes of Judah, were gathered about an open fire. Only a small portion had been read, when the king, far from trembling at the danger hanging over himself and his people, seized the roll and in a frenzy of rage "cut it with the penknife and cast it into the fire that was on the hearth, until all the roll was consumed." Verse 23.

Neither the king nor his princes were afraid "nor rent their garments." Certain of the princes, however, "had made intercession to the king that he would not burn the roll: but he would not hear them." The writing having been destroyed,

the wrath of the wicked king rose against Jeremiah and Baruch, and he forthwith sent for them to be taken; "but the Lord hid them." Verses 24-26.

In bringing to the attention of the temple worshipers, and of the princes and king, the written admonitions contained in the inspired roll, God was graciously seeking to warn the men of Judah for their good. "It may be," He said, "the house of Judah will hear all the evil which I purpose to do unto them; that they may return every man from his evil way; that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin." Verse 3. God pities men struggling in the blindness of perversity; He seeks to enlighten the darkened understanding by sending reproofs and threatenings designed to cause the most exalted to feel their ignorance and to deplore their errors. He endeavors to help the self-complacent to become dissatisfied with their vain attainments and to seek for spiritual blessing through a close connection with heaven.

God's plan is not to send messengers who will please and flatter sinners; He delivers no messages of peace to lull the unsanctified into carnal security. Instead, He lays heavy burdens upon the conscience of the wrongdoer and pierces his soul with sharp arrows of conviction. Ministering angels present to him the fearful judgments of God, to deepen the sense of need and to prompt the agonizing cry, "What must I do to be saved?" Acts 16:30. But the Hand that humbles to the dust, rebukes sin, and puts pride and ambition to shame, is the Hand that lifts up the penitent, stricken one. With deepest sympathy He who permits the chastisement to fall, inquires, "What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?"

When man has sinned against a holy and merciful God,

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he can pursue no course so noble as to repent sincerely and confess his errors in tears and bitterness of soul. This God requires of him; He accepts nothing less than a broken heart and a contrite spirit. But King Jehoiakim and his lords, in their arrogance and pride, refused the invitation of God. They would not heed the warning, and repent. The gracious opportunity proffered them at the time of the burning of the sacred roll, was their last. God had declared that if at that time they refused to hear His voice, He would inflict upon them fearful retribution. They did refuse to hear, and He pronounced His final judgments upon Judah, and He would visit with special wrath the man who had proudly lifted himself up against the Almighty.

“Thus saith the Lord of Jehoiakim king of Judah; He shall have none to sit upon the throne of David: and his dead body shall be cast out in the day to the heat, and in the night to the frost. And I will punish him and his seed and his servants for their iniquity; and I will bring upon them, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and upon the men of Judah, all the evil that I have pronounced against them.” Jeremiah 36:30, 31.

The burning of the roll was not the end of the matter. The written words were more easily disposed of than the reproof and warning they contained and the swift-coming punishment God had pronounced against rebellious Israel. But even the written roll was reproduced. “Take thee again another roll,” the Lord commanded His servant, “and write in it all the former words that were in the first roll, which Jehoiakim the king of Judah hath burned.” The record of the prophecies concerning Judah and Jerusalem had been

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reduced to ashes; but the words were still living in the heart of Jeremiah, "as a burning fire," and the prophet was permitted to reproduce that which the wrath of man would fain have destroyed.

Taking another roll, Jeremiah gave it to Baruch, "who wrote therein from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the book which Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire: and there were added besides unto them many like words." Verses 28, 32. The wrath of man had sought to prevent the labors of the prophet of God; but the very means by which Jehoiakim had endeavored to limit the influence of the servant of Jehovah, gave further opportunity for making plain the divine requirements.

The spirit of opposition to reproof, that led to the persecution and imprisonment of Jeremiah, exists today. Many refuse to heed repeated warnings, preferring rather to listen



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to false teachers who flatter their vanity and overlook their evil-doing. In the day of trouble such will have no sure refuge, no help from heaven. God's chosen servants should meet with courage and patience the trials and sufferings that befall them through reproach, neglect, and misrepresentation. They should continue to discharge faithfully the work God has given them to do, ever remembering that the prophets of old and the Saviour of mankind and His apostles also endured abuse and persecution for the Word's sake.

It was God's purpose that Jehoiakim should heed the counsels of Jeremiah and thus win favor in the eyes of Nebuchadnezzar and save himself much sorrow. The youthful king had sworn allegiance to the Babylonian ruler, and had he remained true to his promise he would have commanded the respect of the heathen, and this would have led to precious opportunities for the conversion of souls.

Scorning the unusual privileges granted him, Judah's king willfully followed a way of his own choosing. He violated his word of honor to the Babylonian ruler, and rebelled. This brought him and his kingdom into a very strait place. Against him were sent "bands of the Chaldees, and bands of the Syrians, and bands of the Moabites, and bands of the children of Ammon," and he was powerless to prevent the land from being overrun by these marauders. 2 Kings 24:2. Within a few years he closed his disastrous reign in ignominy, rejected of Heaven, unloved by his people, and despised by the rulers of Babylon whose confidence he had betrayed—and all as the result of his fatal mistake in turning from the purpose of God as revealed through His appointed messenger.

Jehoiachin [also known as Jeconiah, and Coniah], the son

of Jehoiakim, occupied the throne only three months and ten days, when he surrendered to the Chaldean armies which, because of the rebellion of Judah's ruler, were once more besieging the fated city. On this occasion Nebuchadnezzar "carried away Jehoiachin to Babylon, and the king's mother, and the king's wives, and his officers, and the mighty of the land," several thousand in number, together with "craftsmen and smiths a thousand." With these the king of Babylon took "all the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king's house." 2 Kings 24:15, 16, 13.

The kingdom of Judah, broken in power and robbed of its strength both in men and in treasure, was nevertheless still permitted to exist as a separate government. At its head Nebuchadnezzar placed Mattaniah, a younger son of Josiah, changing his name to Zedekiah.

chapter 36

The Last King of Judah

ZEDEKIAH at the beginning of his reign was trusted fully by the king of Babylon and had as a tried counselor the prophet Jeremiah. By pursuing an honorable course toward the Babylonians and by paying heed to the messages from the Lord through Jeremiah, he could have kept the respect of many in high authority and have had opportunity to communicate to them a knowledge of the true God. Thus the captive exiles already in Babylon would have been placed on vantage ground and granted many liberties; the name of God would have been honored far and wide; and those that remained in the land of Judah would have been spared the terrible calamities that finally came upon them.

Through Jeremiah, Zedekiah and all Judah, including those taken to Babylon, were counseled to submit quietly to the temporary rule of their conquerors. It was especially important that those in captivity should seek the peace of the land into which they had been carried. This, however,

was contrary to the inclinations of the human heart; and Satan, taking advantage of the circumstances, caused false prophets to arise among the people, both in Jerusalem and in Babylon, who declared that the yoke of bondage would soon be broken and the former prestige of the nation restored.

The heeding of such flattering prophecies would have led to fatal moves on the part of the king and the exiles, and would have frustrated the merciful designs of God in their behalf. Lest an insurrection be incited and great suffering ensue, the Lord commanded Jeremiah to meet the crisis without delay, by warning the king of Judah of the sure consequence of rebellion. The captives also were admonished, by written communications, not to be deluded into believing their deliverance near. "Let not your prophets and your diviners, that be in the midst of you, deceive you," he urged. Jeremiah 29:8. In this connection mention was made of the Lord's purpose to restore Israel at the close of the seventy years of captivity foretold by His messengers.

With what tender compassion did God inform His captive people of His plans for Israel! He knew that should they be persuaded by false prophets to look for a speedy deliverance, their position in Babylon would be made very difficult. Any demonstration or insurrection on their part would awaken the vigilance and severity of the Chaldean authorities and would lead to a further restriction of their liberties. Suffering and disaster would result. He desired them to submit quietly to their fate and make their servitude as pleasant as possible; and his counsel to them was: "Build ye houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them; . . . and seek the peace of the city whither I

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have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace.”
Verses 5-7.

Among the false teachers in Babylon were two men who claimed to be holy, but whose lives were corrupt. Jeremiah had condemned the evil course of these men and had warned them of their danger. Angered by reproof, they sought to oppose the work of the true prophet by stirring up the people to discredit his words and to act contrary to the counsel of God in the matter of subjecting themselves to the king of Babylon. The Lord testified through Jeremiah that these false prophets should be delivered into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar and slain before his eyes. Not long afterward, this prediction was literally fulfilled.

To the end of time, men will arise to create confusion and rebellion among those who claim to be representatives of the true God. Those who prophesy lies will encourage men to look upon sin as a light thing. When the terrible results of their evil deeds are made manifest, they will seek, if possible, to make the one who has faithfully warned them, responsible for their difficulties, even as the Jews charged Jeremiah with their evil fortunes. But as surely as the words of Jehovah through His prophet were vindicated anciently, so surely will the certainty of His messages be established today.

From the first, Jeremiah had followed a consistent course in counseling submission to the Babylonians. This counsel was given not only to Judah, but to many of the surrounding nations. In the earlier portion of Zedekiah's reign, ambassadors from the rulers of Edom, Moab, Tyre, and other nations visited the king of Judah to learn whether in his judg-

ment the time was opportune for a united revolt and whether he would join them in battling against the king of Babylon. While these ambassadors were awaiting a response, the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, saying, "Make thee bonds and yokes, and put them upon thy neck, and send them to the king of Edom, and to the king of Moab, and to the king of the Ammonites, and to the king of Tyrus, and to the king of Zidon, by the hand of the messengers which come to Jerusalem unto Zedekiah king of Judah." Jeremiah 27:2, 3.

Jeremiah was commanded to instruct the ambassadors to inform their rulers that God had given them all into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, and that they were to "serve him, and his son, and his son's son, until the very time of his land come." Verse 7.

The ambassadors were further instructed to declare to their rulers that if they refused to serve the Babylonian king they should be punished "with the sword, and with the famine, and with the pestilence" till they were consumed. Especially were they to turn from the teaching of false prophets who might counsel otherwise. "Hearken not ye to your prophets," the Lord declared, "nor to your diviners, nor to your dreamers, nor to your enchanters, nor to your sorcerers, which speak unto you, saying, Ye shall not serve the king of Babylon: for they prophesy a lie unto you, to remove you far from your land; and that I should drive you out, and ye should perish. But the nations that bring their neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him, those will I let remain still in their own land, saith the Lord; and they shall till it, and dwell therein." Verses 8-11. The lightest punishment that a merciful God could inflict upon so rebellious a people was

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submission to the rule of Babylon, but if they warred against this decree of servitude they were to feel the full rigor of His chastisement.

The amazement of the assembled council of nations knew no bounds when Jeremiah, carrying the yoke of subjection about his neck, made known to them the will of God.

Against determined opposition Jeremiah stood firmly for the policy of submission. Prominent among those who presumed to gainsay the counsel of the Lord was Hananiah, one of the false prophets against whom the people had been warned. Thinking to gain the favor of the king and of the royal court, he lifted his voice in protest, declaring that God had given him words of encouragement for the Jews. Said he: "Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, say-



ing, I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon. Within two full years will I bring again into this place all the vessels of the Lord's house, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon took away from this place, and carried them to Babylon: and I will bring again to this place Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah, with all the captives of Judah, that went into Babylon, saith the Lord: for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon." Jeremiah 28:2-4.

Jeremiah, in the presence of the priests and people, earnestly entreated them to submit to the king of Babylon for the time the Lord had specified. He cited the men of Judah to the prophecies of Hosea, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, and others whose messages of reproof and warning had been similar to his own. He referred them to events which had taken place in fulfillment of prophecies of retribution for unrepented sin. In the past the judgments of God had been visited upon the impenitent in exact fulfillment of His purpose as revealed through His messengers.

"The prophet which prophesieth of peace," Jeremiah proposed in conclusion, "when the word of the prophet shall come to pass, then shall the prophet be known, that the Lord hath truly sent him." Verse 9. If Israel chose to run the risk, future developments would effectually decide which was the true prophet.

The words of Jeremiah counseling submission aroused Hananiah to a daring challenge of the reliability of the message delivered. Taking the symbolic yoke from Jeremiah's neck, Hananiah broke it, saying, "Thus saith the Lord; Even so will I break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon from the neck of all nations within the space of two full years.

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“And the prophet Jeremiah went his way.” Verse 11. Apparently he could do nothing more than to retire from the scene of conflict. But Jeremiah was given another message. “Go and tell Hananiah,” he was bidden, “Thus saith the Lord; Thou hast broken the yokes of wood; but thou shalt make for them yokes of iron. For thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; I have put a yoke of iron upon the neck of all these nations, that they may serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; and they shall serve him. . . .

“Then said the prophet Jeremiah unto Hananiah the prophet, Hear now, Hananiah; The Lord hath not sent thee; but thou makest this people to trust in a lie. Therefore thus saith the Lord; Behold, I will cast thee from off the face of the earth: this year thou shalt die, because thou hast taught rebellion against the Lord. So Hananiah the prophet died the same year in the seventh month.” Verses 13-17.

The false prophet had strengthened the unbelief of the people in Jeremiah and his message. He had wickedly declared himself the Lord’s messenger, and he suffered death in consequence. In the fifth month Jeremiah prophesied the death of Hananiah, and in the seventh month his words were proved true by their fulfillment.

The unrest caused by the representations of the false prophets brought Zedekiah under suspicion of treason, and only by quick and decisive action on his part was he permitted to continue reigning as a vassal. Opportunity for such action was taken advantage of shortly after the return of the ambassadors from Jerusalem to the surrounding nations, when the king of Judah accompanied Seraiah, “a quiet prince,” on an important mission to Babylon. Jeremiah 51:59. During

this visit to the Chaldean court, Zedekiah renewed his oath of allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar.

Through Daniel and others of the Hebrew captives, the Babylonian monarch had been made acquainted with the power and supreme authority of the true God; and when Zedekiah once more solemnly promised to remain loyal, Nebuchadnezzar required him to swear to this promise in the name of the Lord God of Israel. Had Zedekiah respected this renewal of his covenant oath, his loyalty would have had a profound influence on the minds of many who were watching the conduct of those who claimed to reverence the name and to cherish the honor of the God of the Hebrews.

But Judah's king lost sight of his high privilege of bringing honor to the name of the living God. Of Zedekiah it is recorded: "He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord his God, and humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet speaking from the mouth of the Lord. And he also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God: but he stiffened his neck, and hardened his heart from turning unto the Lord God of Israel." 2 Chronicles 36:12, 13.

While Jeremiah continued to bear his testimony in the land of Judah, the prophet Ezekiel was raised up from among the captives in Babylon, to warn and to comfort the exiles, and also to confirm the word of the Lord that was being spoken through Jeremiah. During the years that remained of Zedekiah's reign, Ezekiel made very plain the folly of trusting to the false predictions of those who were causing the captives to hope for an early return to Jerusalem. He was also instructed to foretell, by means of a variety of symbols

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and solemn messages, the siege and utter destruction of Jerusalem.

In the sixth year of the reign of Zedekiah, the Lord revealed to Ezekiel in vision some of the abominations that were being practiced in Jerusalem, and within the gate of the Lord's house, and even in the inner court. The chambers of images, and the pictured idols, "every form of creeping things, and abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel"—all these in rapid succession passed before the astonished gaze of the prophet. Ezekiel 8:10.

Those who should have been spiritual leaders among the people, "the ancients of the house of Israel," to the number of seventy, were seen offering incense before the idolatrous representations that had been introduced into hidden chambers within the sacred precincts of the temple court. "The Lord seeth us not," the men of Judah flattered themselves as they engaged in their heathenish practices; "the Lord hath forsaken the earth," they blasphemously declared Verses 11, 12.

There were still "greater abominations" for the prophet to behold. At a gate leading from the outer to the inner court he was shown "women weeping for Tammuz," and within "the inner court of the Lord's house, . . . at the door of the temple of the Lord, between the porch and the altar, were about five and twenty men, with their backs toward the temple of the Lord, and their faces toward the east; and they worshiped the sun toward the east." Verses 13-16.

And now the glorious Being who accompanied Ezekiel throughout this astonishing vision of wickedness in high places in the land of Judah, inquired of the prophet: "Hast



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thou seen this, O son of man? Is it a light thing to the house of Judah that they commit the abominations which they commit here? for they have filled the land with violence, and have returned to provoke Me to anger: and, lo, they put the branch to their nose. Therefore will I also deal in fury: Mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in Mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them." Verses 17, 18.

Through Jeremiah the Lord had declared of the wicked men who presumptuously dared to stand before the people in His name: "Both prophet and priest are profane; yea, in My house have I found their wickedness." Jeremiah 23:11. In the terrible arraignment of Judah as recorded in the closing narrative of the chronicler of Zedekiah's reign, this charge of violating the sanctity of the temple was repeated. "Moreover," the sacred writer declared, "all the chief of the priests, and the people, transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen; and polluted the house of the Lord which He had hallowed in Jerusalem." 2 Chronicles 36:14.

The day of doom for the kingdom of Judah was fast approaching. No longer could the Lord set before them the hope of averting the severest of His judgments. "Should ye be utterly unpunished?" He inquired. "Ye shall not be unpunished." Jeremiah 25:29.

Even these words were received with mocking derision. "The days are prolonged, and every vision faileth," declared the impenitent. But through Ezekiel this denial of the sure word of prophecy was sternly rebuked. "Tell them," the Lord declared, "I will make this proverb to cease, and they shall no more use it as a proverb in Israel; but say unto them, The

days are at hand, and the effect of every vision. For there shall be no more any vain vision nor flattering divination within the house of Israel. For I am the Lord: I will speak, and the word that I shall speak shall come to pass; it shall be no more prolonged: for in your days, O rebellious house, will I say the word, and will perform it, saith the Lord God.

"Again," testifies Ezekiel, "the word of the Lord came to me, saying, Son of man, behold, they of the house of Israel say, The vision that he seeth is for many days to come, and he prophesieth of the times that are far off. Therefore say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; There shall none of My words be prolonged any more, but the word which I have spoken shall be done, saith the Lord God." Ezekiel 12:22-28.

Foremost among those who were rapidly leading the nation to ruin was Zedekiah their king. Forsaking utterly the counsels of the Lord as given through the prophets, forgetting the debt of gratitude he owed Nebuchadnezzar, violating his solemn oath of allegiance taken in the name of the Lord God of Israel, Judah's king rebelled against the prophets, against his benefactor, and against his God. In the vanity of his own wisdom he turned for help to the ancient enemy of Israel's prosperity, "sending his ambassadors into Egypt, that they might give him horses and much people."

"Shall he prosper?" the Lord inquired concerning the one who had thus basely betrayed every sacred trust; "shall he escape that doeth such things? or shall he break the covenant, and be delivered? As I live, saith the Lord God, surely in the place where the king dwelleth that made him king, whose oath he despised, and whose covenant he brake, even with him in the midst of Babyon he shall die. Neither shall Phar-

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aoh with his mighty army and great company make for him in the war: . . . seeing he despised the oath by breaking the covenant, when, lo, he had given his hand, and hath done all these things, he shall not escape.” Ezekiel 17:15-18.

To the “profane wicked prince” had come the day of final reckoning. “Remove the diadem,” the Lord decreed, “and take off the crown.” Not until Christ Himself should set up His kingdom was Judah again to be permitted to have a king. “I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it,” was the divine edict concerning the throne of the house of David; “and it shall be no more, until He come whose right it is; and I will give it Him.” Ezekiel 21:25-27.

Carried Captive Into Babylon

IN THE ninth year of Zedekiah's reign "Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came, he, and all his host, against Jerusalem," to besiege the city. 2 Kings 25:1. The outlook for Judah was hopeless. "Behold, I am against thee," the Lord Himself declared through Ezekiel. "I the Lord have drawn forth My sword out of his sheath: it shall not return any more. . . . Every heart shall melt, and all hands shall be feeble, and every spirit shall faint, and all knees shall be weak as water." "I will pour out Mine indignation upon thee, I will blow against thee in the fire of My wrath, and deliver thee into the hand of brutish men, and skillful to destroy." Ezekiel 21:3, 5-7, 31.

The Egyptians endeavored to come to the rescue of the beleaguered city; and the Chaldeans, in order to keep them back, abandoned for a time their siege of the Judean capital. Hope sprang up in the heart of Zedekiah, and he sent a messenger to Jeremiah, asking him to pray to God in behalf of the Hebrew nation.

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The prophet's fearful answer was that the Chaldeans would return and destroy the city. The fiat had gone forth; no longer could the impenitent nation avert the divine judgments. "Deceive not yourselves," the Lord warned His people. "The Chaldeans . . . shall not depart. For though ye had smitten the whole army of the Chaldeans that fight against you, and there remained but wounded men among them, yet should they rise up every man in his tent, and burn this city with fire." Jeremiah 37:9, 10. The remnant of Judah were to go into captivity, to learn through adversity the lessons they had refused to learn under circumstances more favorable. From this decree of the holy Watcher there could be no appeal.

Among the righteous still in Jerusalem, to whom had been made plain the divine purpose, were some who determined to place beyond the reach of ruthless hands the sacred ark containing the tables of stone on which had been traced the precepts of the Decalogue. This they did. With mourning and sadness they secreted the ark in a cave, where it was to be hidden from the people of Israel and Judah because of their sins, and was to be no more restored to them. That sacred ark is yet hidden. It has never been disturbed since it was secreted.

For many years Jeremiah had stood before the people as a faithful witness for God; and now, as the fated city was about to pass into the hands of the heathen, he considered his work done and attempted to leave, but was prevented by a son of one of the false prophets, who reported that Jeremiah was about to join the Babylonians, to whom he had repeatedly urged the men of Judah to submit. The prophet denied

the lying charge, but nevertheless "the princes were wroth with Jeremiah, and smote him, and put him in prison." Verse 15.

The hopes that had sprung up in the hearts of princes and people when the armies of Nebuchadnezzar turned south to meet the Egyptians, were soon dashed to the ground. The word of the Lord had been, "Behold, I am against thee, Pharaoh king of Egypt." The might of Egypt was but a broken reed. "All the inhabitants of Egypt," Inspiration had declared, "shall know that I am the Lord, because they have been a staff of reed to the house of Israel." "I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon, and the arms of Pharaoh shall fall down; and they shall know that I am the Lord, when I shall put My sword into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall stretch it out upon the land of Egypt." Ezekiel 29:3, 6; 30:25, 26.

While the princes of Judah were still vainly looking toward Egypt for help, King Zedekiah with anxious foreboding was thinking of the prophet of God that had been thrust into prison. After many days the king sent for him and asked him secretly, "Is there any word from the Lord?" Jeremiah answered, "There is: for, said He, thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon.

"Moreover Jeremiah said unto King Zedekiah, What have I offended against thee, or against thy servants, or against this people, that ye have put me in prison? Where are now your prophets which prophesied unto you, saying, The king of Babylon shall not come against you, nor against this land? Therefore hear now, I pray thee, O my lord the king: let my supplication, I pray thee, be accepted before thee; that thou

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cause me not to return to the house of Jonathan the scribe, lest I die there." Jeremiah 37:17-20.

At this Zedekiah commanded that they "commit Jeremiah into the court of the prison, and that they should give him daily a piece of bread out of the bakers' street, until all the bread in the city were spent. Thus Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison." Verse 21.

The king dared not openly manifest any faith in Jeremiah. Though his fear drove him to seek information of him privately, yet he was too weak to brave the disapprobation of his princes and of the people by submitting to the will of God as declared by the prophet.

From the court of the prison Jeremiah continued to advise submission to the Babylonian rule. To offer resistance would be to invite sure death. The message of the Lord to Judah was: "He that remaineth in this city shall die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence: but he that goeth forth to the Chaldeans shall live; for he shall have his life for a prey, and shall live." Plain and positive were the words spoken. In the name of the Lord the prophet boldly declared, "This city shall surely be given into the hand of the king of Babylon's army, which shall take it." Jeremiah 38:2, 3.

At last the princes, enraged over the repeated counsels of Jeremiah, which were contrary to their set policy of resistance, made a vigorous protest before the king, urging that the prophet was an enemy to the nation, and that his words had weakened the hands of the people and brought misfortune upon them; therefore he should be put to death.

The cowardly king knew that the charges were false; but in order to propitiate those who occupied high and influential



positions in the nation, he feigned to believe their falsehoods and gave Jeremiah into their hands to do with him as they pleased. The prophet was cast "into the dungeon of Malchiah the son of Hammelech, that was in the court of the prison: and they let down Jeremiah with cords. And in the dungeon there was no water, but mire: so Jeremiah sunk in the mire." Verse 6. But God raised up friends for him, who besought the king in his behalf, and had him again removed to the court of the prison.

Once more the king sent privately for Jeremiah, and bade him faithfully relate the purpose of God toward Jerusalem. In response, Jeremiah inquired, "If I declare it unto thee, wilt thou not surely put me to death? and if I give thee counsel, wilt thou not hearken unto me?" The king entered into a secret compact with the prophet. "As the Lord liveth, that made us this soul," Zedekiah promised, "I will not put thee to death, neither will I give thee into the hand of these men that seek thy life." Verses 15, 16.

There was still opportunity for the king to reveal a willingness to heed the warnings of Jehovah, and thus to temper with mercy the judgments even now falling on city and nation. "If thou wilt assuredly go forth unto the king of Babylon's princes," was the message given the king, "then thy soul shall live, and this city shall not be burned with fire; and thou shalt live, and thine house: but if thou wilt not go forth to the king of Babylon's princes, then shall this city be given into the hand of the Chaldeans, and they shall burn it with fire, and thou shalt not escape out of their hand."

"I am afraid of the Jews that are fallen to the Chaldeans," the king replied, "lest they deliver me into their hand, and

they mock me." But the prophet promised, "They shall not deliver thee." And he added the earnest entreaty, "Obey, I beseech thee, the voice of the Lord, which I speak unto thee: so it shall be well unto thee, and thy soul shall live." Verses 17-20.

Thus even to the last hour, God made plain His willingness to show mercy to those who should choose to submit to His just requirements. Had the king chosen to obey, the lives of the people might have been spared, and the city saved from conflagration; but he thought he had gone too far to retrace his steps. He was afraid of the Jews, afraid of ridicule, afraid for his life. After years of rebellion against God, Zedekiah thought it too humiliating to say to his people, I accept the word of the Lord, as spoken through the prophet Jeremiah; I dare not venture to war against the enemy in the face of all these warnings.

With tears Jeremiah entreated Zedekiah to save himself and his people. With anguish of spirit he assured him that unless he should heed the counsel of God, he could not escape with his life, and all his possessions would fall to the Babylonians. But the king had started on the wrong course, and he would not retrace his steps. He decided to follow the counsel of the false prophets, and of the men whom he really despised, and who ridiculed his weakness in yielding so readily to their wishes. He sacrificed the noble freedom of his manhood and became a cringing slave to public opinion. With no fixed purpose to do evil, he was also without resolution to stand boldly for the right. Convicted though he was of the value of the counsel given by Jeremiah, he had not the moral stamina to obey; and as a consequence he advanced steadily in the wrong direction.

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The king was even too weak to be willing that his courtiers and people should know that he had held a conference with Jeremiah, so fully had the fear of man taken possession of his soul. If Zedekiah had stood up bravely and declared that he believed the words of the prophet, already half fulfilled, what desolation might have been averted! He should have said, I will obey the Lord, and save the city from utter ruin. I dare not disregard the commands of God because of the fear or favor of man. I love the truth, I hate sin, and I will follow the counsel of the Mighty One of Israel.

Then the people would have respected his courageous spirit, and those who were wavering between faith and unbelief would have taken a firm stand for the right. The very fearlessness and justice of this course would have inspired his subjects with admiration and loyalty. He would have had ample support, and Judah would have been spared the untold woe of carnage and famine and fire.

The weakness of Zedekiah was a sin for which he paid a fearful penalty. The enemy swept down like a resistless avalanche and devastated the city. The Hebrew armies were beaten back in confusion. The nation was conquered. Zedekiah was taken prisoner, and his sons were slain before his eyes. The king was led away from Jerusalem a captive, his eyes were put out, and after arriving in Babylon he perished miserably. The beautiful temple that for more than four centuries had crowned the summit of Mount Zion was not spared by the Chaldeans. "They burnt the house of God, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire, and destroyed all the goodly vessels thereof." 2 Chronicles 36:19.



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At the time of the final overthrow of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, many had escaped the horrors of the long siege, only to perish by the sword. Of those who still remained, some, notably the chief of the priests and officers and the princes of the realm, were taken to Babylon and there executed as traitors. Others were carried captive, to live in servitude to Nebuchadnezzar and to his sons "until the reign of the kingdom of Persia: to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah." Verses 20, 21.

Of Jeremiah himself it is recorded: "Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon gave charge concerning Jeremiah to Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard, saying, Take him, and look well to him, and do him no harm; but do unto him even as he shall say unto thee." Jeremiah 39:11, 12.

Released from prison by the Babylonian officers, the prophet chose to cast in his lot with the feeble remnant, "certain poor of the land" left by the Chaldeans to be "vine-dressers and husbandmen." Over these the Babylonians set Gedaliah as governor. Only a few months passed before the newly appointed governor was treacherously slain. The poor people, after passing through many trials, were finally persuaded by their leaders to take refuge in the land of Egypt. Against this move, Jeremiah lifted his voice in protest. "Go ye not into Egypt," he pleaded. But the inspired counsel was not heeded, and "all the remnant of Judah, . . . even men, and women, and children," took flight into Egypt. "They obeyed not the voice of the Lord: thus came they even to Tahpanhes." Jeremiah 43:5-7.

The prophecies of doom pronounced by Jeremiah upon the remnant that had rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar by

fleeing to Egypt were mingled with promises of pardon to those who should repent of their folly and stand ready to return. While the Lord would not spare those who turned from His counsel to the seductive influences of Egyptian idolatry, yet He would show mercy to those who should prove loyal and true. "A small number that escape the sword shall return out of the land of Egypt into the land of Judah," He declared; "and all the remnant of Judah, that are gone into the land of Egypt to sojourn there, shall know whose words shall stand, Mine, or theirs." Jeremiah 44:28.

The sorrow of the prophet over the utter perversity of those who should have been the spiritual light of the world, his sorrow over the fate of Zion and of the people carried captive to Babylon, is revealed in the lamentations he has left on record as a memorial of the folly of turning from the counsels of Jehovah to human wisdom. Amid the ruin wrought, Jeremiah could still declare, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed;" and his constant prayer was, "Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord." Lamentations 3:22, 40. While Judah was still a kingdom among the nations, he had inquired of his God, "Hast Thou utterly rejected Judah? hath Thy soul loathed Zion?" and he had made bold to plead, "Do not abhor us, for Thy name's sake." Jeremiah 14:19, 21. The prophet's absolute faith in God's eternal purpose to bring order out of confusion, and to demonstrate to the nations of earth and to the entire universe His attributes of justice and love, now led him to plead confidently in behalf of those who might turn from evil to righteousness.

But now Zion was utterly destroyed; the people of God

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were in their captivity. Overwhelmed with grief, the prophet exclaimed: "How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people! how is she become as a widow! she that was great among the nations, and princess among the provinces, how is she become tributary! She weepeth sore in the night, and her tears are on her cheeks: among all her lovers she hath none to comfort her: all her friends have dealt treacherously with her, they are become her enemies.

"Judah is gone into captivity because of affliction, and because of great servitude: she dwelleth among the heathen, she findeth no rest: all her persecutors overtook her between the straits. The ways of Zion do mourn, because none come to the solemn feasts: all her gates are desolate: her priests sigh, her virgins are afflicted, and she is in bitterness. Her adversaries are the chief, her enemies prosper; for the Lord hath afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions: her children are gone into captivity before the enemy."

"How hath the Lord covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in His anger, and cast down from heaven unto the earth the beauty of Israel, and remembered not His footstool in the day of His anger! The Lord hath swallowed up all the habitations of Jacob, and hath not pitied: He hath thrown down in His wrath the strongholds of the daughter of Judah; He hath brought them down to the ground: He hath polluted the kingdom and the princes thereof. He hath cut off in His fierce anger all the horn of Israel: He hath drawn back His right hand from before the enemy, and He burned against Jacob like a flaming fire, which devoureth round about. He hath bent His bow like an enemy: He stood with His right hand as an adversary, and slew all that were pleasant to the

eye in the tabernacle of the daughter of Zion: He poured out His fury like fire."

"What thing shall I take to witness for thee? what thing shall I liken to thee, O daughter of Jerusalem? what shall I equal to thee, that I may comfort thee, O virgin daughter of Zion? for thy breach is great like the sea: who can heal thee?"

"Remember, O Lord, what is come upon us: consider, and behold our reproach. Our inheritance is turned to strangers, our houses to aliens. We are orphans and fatherless, our mothers are as widows. . . . Our fathers have sinned, and are not; and we have borne their iniquities. Servants have ruled over us: there is none that doth deliver us out of their hand. . . . For this our heart is faint; for these things our eyes are dim."

"Thou, O Lord, remainest forever; Thy throne from generation to generation. Wherefore dost Thou forget us forever, and forsake us so long time? Turn Thou us unto Thee, O Lord, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old." Lamentations 1:1-5; 2:1-4, 13; 5:1-3, 7, 8, 17, 19-21.

chapter 38

Light Through Darkness

THE dark years of destruction and death marking the end of the kingdom of Judah would have brought despair to the stoutest heart had it not been for the encouragements in the prophetic utterances of God's messengers. Through Jeremiah in Jerusalem, through Daniel in the court of Babylon, through Ezekiel on the banks of the Chebar, the Lord in mercy made clear His eternal purpose and gave assurance of His willingness to fulfill to His chosen people the promises recorded in the writings of Moses. That which He had said He would do for those who should prove true to Him, He would surely bring to pass. "The word of God . . . liveth and abideth forever." 1 Peter 1:23.

In the days of the wilderness wandering the Lord had made abundant provision for His children to keep in remembrance the words of His law. After the settlement in Canaan the divine precepts were to be repeated daily in every home; they were to be written plainly upon the doorposts and gates,

and spread upon memorial tablets. They were to be set to music and chanted by young and old. Priests were to teach these holy precepts in public assemblies, and the rulers of the land were to make them their daily study. "Meditate therein day and night," the Lord commanded Joshua concerning the book of the law, "that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success." Joshua 1:8.

The writings of Moses were taught by Joshua to all Israel. "There was not a word of all that Moses commanded, which Joshua read not before all the congregation of Israel, with the women, and the little ones, and the strangers that were conversant among them." Joshua 8:35. This was in harmony with the express command of Jehovah providing for a public rehearsal of the words of the book of the law every seven years, during the Feast of Tabernacles. "Gather the people together, men, and women, and children, and thy stranger that is within thy gates," the spiritual leaders of Israel had been instructed, "that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the Lord your God, and observe to do all the words of this law: and that their children, which have not known anything, may hear, and learn to fear the Lord your God, as long as ye live in the land whither ye go over Jordan to possess it." Deuteronomy 31:12, 13.

Had this counsel been heeded through the centuries that followed, how different would have been Israel's history! Only as a reverence for God's Holy Word was cherished in the hearts of the people, could they hope to fulfill the divine purpose. It was regard for the law of God that gave Israel



strength during the reign of David and the earlier years of Solomon's rule; it was through faith in the living word that reformation was wrought in the days of Elijah and of Josiah. And it was to these same Scriptures of truth, Israel's richest heritage, that Jeremiah appealed in his efforts toward reform. Wherever he ministered he met the people with the earnest plea, "Hear ye the words of this covenant," words which would bring them a full understanding of God's purpose to extend to all nations a knowledge of saving truth. Jeremiah 11:2.

In the closing years of Judah's apostasy the exhortations of the prophets were seemingly of but little avail; and as the armies of the Chaldeans came for the third and last time to besiege Jerusalem, hope fled from every heart. Jeremiah predicted utter ruin; and it was because of his insistence on surrender that he had finally been thrown into prison. But God left not to hopeless despair the faithful remnant who were still in the city. Even while Jeremiah was kept under close surveillance by those who scorned his messages, there came to him fresh revelations concerning Heaven's willingness to forgive and to save, which have been an unfailing source of comfort to the church of God from that day to this.

Laying fast hold on the promises of God, Jeremiah, by means of an acted parable, illustrated before the inhabitants of the fated city his strong faith in the ultimate fulfillment of God's purpose for His people. In the presence of witnesses, and with careful observance of all necessary legal forms, he purchased for seventeen shekels of silver an ancestral field situated in the neighboring village of Anathoth.

From every human point of view this purchase of land

Believing God's promises for the future,
Jeremiah purchased his ancestral land,
and the deed was legally registered.

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JOHN STEEL, ARTIST

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in territory already under the control of the Babylonians, appeared to be an act of folly. The prophet himself had been foretelling the destruction of Jerusalem, the desolation of Judea, and the utter ruin of the kingdom. He had been prophesying a long period of captivity in faraway Babylon. Already advanced in years, he could never hope to receive personal benefit from the purchase he had made. However, his study of the prophecies that were recorded in the Scriptures had created within his heart a firm conviction that the Lord purposed to restore to the children of the captivity their ancient possession of the Land of Promise. With the eye of faith Jeremiah saw the exiles returning at the end of the years of affliction and reoccupying the land of their fathers. Through the purchase of the Anathoth estate he would do what he could to inspire others with the hope that brought so much comfort to his own heart.

Having signed the deeds of transfer and secured the countersignatures of witnesses, Jeremiah charged Baruch his secretary: "Take these evidences, this evidence of the purchase, both which is sealed, and this evidence which is open; and put them in an earthen vessel, that they may continue many days. For thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land." Jeremiah 32:14, 15.

So discouraging was the outlook for Judah at the time of this extraordinary transaction that immediately after perfecting the details of the purchase and arranging for the preservation of the written records, the faith of Jeremiah, unshaken though it had been, was now sorely tried. Had he, in his endeavor to encourage Judah, acted presumptuously? In his

desire to establish confidence in the promises of God's word, had he given ground for false hope? Those who had entered into covenant relationship with God had long since scorned the provisions made in their behalf. Could the promises to the chosen nation ever meet with complete fulfillment?

Perplexed in spirit, bowed down with sorrow over the sufferings of those who had refused to repent of their sins, the prophet appealed to God for further enlightenment concerning the divine purpose for mankind.

"Ah Lord God!" he prayed, "behold, Thou hast made the heaven and the earth by Thy great power and stretched-out arm, and there is nothing too hard for Thee: Thou showest loving-kindness unto thousands, and recompensest the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their children after them: the great, the mighty God, the Lord of hosts, is His name, great in counsel, and mighty in work: for Thine eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men: to give everyone according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings: which hast set signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, even unto this day, and in Israel, and among other men; and hast made Thee a name, as at this day; and hast brought forth Thy people Israel out of the land of Egypt with signs, and with wonders, and with a strong hand, and with a stretched-out arm, and with great terror; and hast given them this land, which Thou didst swear to their fathers to give them, a land flowing with milk and honey; and they came in, and possessed it; but they obeyed not Thy voice, neither walked in Thy law; they have done nothing of all that Thou commandedst them to do: therefore Thou hast caused all this evil to come upon them." Verses 17-23.

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Nebuchadnezzar's armies were about to take the walls of Zion by storm. Thousands were perishing in a last desperate defense of the city. Many thousands more were dying of hunger and disease. The fate of Jerusalem was already sealed. The besieging towers of the enemy's forces were already overlooking the walls. "Behold the mounts," the prophet continued in his prayer to God; "they are come unto the city to take it; and the city is given into the hand of the Chaldeans, that fight against it, because of the sword, and of the famine, and of the pestilence: and what Thou hast spoken is come to pass; and, behold, Thou seest it. And Thou hast said unto me, O Lord God, Buy thee the field for money, and take witnesses; for the city is given into the hand of the Chaldeans." Verses 24, 25.

The prayer of the prophet was graciously answered. "The word of the Lord unto Jeremiah" in that hour of distress, when the faith of the messenger of truth was being tried as by fire, was: "Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh: is there anything too hard for Me?" Verses 26, 27. The city was soon to fall into the hand of the Chaldeans; its gates and palaces were to be set on fire and burned; but, notwithstanding the fact that destruction was imminent and the inhabitants of Jerusalem were to be carried away captive, nevertheless the eternal purpose of Jehovah for Israel was yet to be fulfilled. In further answer to the prayer of His servant, the Lord declared concerning those upon whom His chastisements were falling:

"Behold, I will gather them out of all countries, whither I have driven them in Mine anger, and in My fury, and in great wrath; and I will bring them again unto this place, and

I will cause them to dwell safely: and they shall be My people, and I will be their God: and I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear Me forever, for the good of them, and of their children after them: and I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from Me. Yea, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will plant them in this land assuredly with My whole heart and with My whole soul.

“For thus saith the Lord; Like as I have brought all this great evil upon this people, so will I bring upon them all the good that I have promised them. And fields shall be bought in this land, whereof ye say, It is desolate without man or beast; it is given into the hand of the Chaldeans. Men shall buy fields for money, and subscribe evidences, and seal them, and take witnesses in the land of Benjamin, and in the places about Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, and in the cities of the mountains, and in the cities of the valley, and in the cities of the south: for I will cause their captivity to return, saith the Lord.” Verses 37-44.

In confirmation of these assurances of deliverance and restoration, “the word of the Lord came unto Jeremiah the second time, while he was yet shut up in the court of the prison, saying,

“Thus saith the Lord the Maker thereof, the Lord that formed it, to establish it; the Lord is His name; Call unto Me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not. For thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning the houses of this city, and concerning the houses of the kings of Judah, which are thrown

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down by the mounts, and by the sword. . . . Behold, I will bring it health and cure, and I will cure them, and will reveal unto them the abundance of peace and truth. And I will cause the captivity of Judah and the captivity of Israel to return, and will build them, as at the first. And I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against Me; and I will pardon all their iniquities. . . . And it shall be to Me a name of joy, a praise and an honor before all the nations of the earth, which shall hear all the good that I do unto them: and they shall fear and tremble for all the goodness and for all the prosperity that I procure unto it.

“Thus saith the Lord; Again there shall be heard in this place, which ye say shall be desolate without man and without beast, even in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem, . . . the voice of joy, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the voice of them that shall say, Praise the Lord of hosts: for the Lord is good; for His mercy endureth forever: and of them that shall bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of the Lord. For I will cause to return the captivity of the land, as at the first, saith the Lord.

“Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Again in this place, which is desolate without man and without beast, and in all the cities thereof, shall be an habitation of shepherds causing their flocks to lie down. In the cities of the mountains, and in the cities of the vale, and in the cities of the south, and in the land of Benjamin, and in the places about Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, shall the flocks pass again under the hands of him that telleth them, saith the Lord.

“Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will per-

form that good thing which I have promised unto the house of Israel and to the house of Judah." Jeremiah 33:1-14.

Thus was the church of God comforted in one of the darkest hours of her long conflict with the forces of evil. Satan had seemingly triumphed in his efforts to destroy Israel; but the Lord was overruling the events of the present, and during the years that were to follow, His people were to have opportunity to redeem the past. His message to the church was:

"Fear thou not, O My servant Jacob; . . . neither be dismayed, O Israel: for, lo, I will save thee from afar, and thy seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return, and shall be in rest, and be quiet, and none shall make him afraid. For I am with thee, saith the Lord, to save thee." "I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds." Jeremiah 30:10, 11, 17.

In the glad day of restoration the tribes of divided Israel were to be reunited as one people. The Lord was to be acknowledged as ruler over "all the families of Israel." "They shall be My people," He declared. "Sing with gladness for Jacob, and shout among the chief of the nations: publish ye, praise ye, and say, O Lord, save Thy people, the remnant of Israel. Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the coasts of the earth, and with them the blind and the lame; . . . they shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble: for I am a Father to Israel, and Ephraim is My first-born." Jeremiah 31:1, 7-9.

Humbled in the sight of the nations, those who once had

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been recognized as favored of Heaven above all other peoples of the earth were to learn in exile the lesson of obedience so necessary for their future happiness. Until they had learned this lesson, God could not do for them all that He desired to do. "I will correct thee in measure, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished," He declared in explanation of His purpose to chastise them for their spiritual good. Jeremiah 30:11. Yet those who had been the object of His tender love were not forever set aside; before all the nations of earth He would demonstrate His plan to bring victory out of apparent defeat, to save rather than to destroy. To the prophet was given the message:

"He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock. For the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and ransomed him from the hand of him that was stronger than he. Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow together to the goodness of the Lord, for wheat, and for wine, and for oil, and for the young of the flock and of the herd: and their soul shall be as a watered garden; and they shall not sorrow any more at all. . . . I will turn their mourning into joy, and will comfort them, and make them rejoice from their sorrow. And I will satiate the soul of the priests with fatness, and My people shall be satisfied with My goodness, saith the Lord."

"Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; As yet they shall use this speech in the land of Judah and in the cities thereof, when I shall bring again their captivity; The Lord bless thee, O habitation of justice, and mountain of holiness. And there shall dwell in Judah itself, and in all the cities thereof together, husbandmen, and they that go forth

with flocks. For I have satiated the weary soul, and I have replenished every sorrowful soul."

"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which My covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord: but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be My people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." Jeremiah 31:10-14, 23-25, 31-34.



chapter 39

This chapter is based on Daniel 1.

In the Court of Babylon

AMONG the children of Israel who were carried captive to Babylon at the beginning of the seventy years' captivity were Christian patriots, men who were as true as steel to principle, who would not be corrupted by selfishness, but who would honor God at the loss of all things. In the land of their captivity these men were to carry out God's purpose by giving to heathen nations the blessings that come through a knowledge of Jehovah. They were to be His representatives. Never were they to compromise with idolaters; their faith and their name as worshipers of the living God they were to bear as a high honor. And this they did. In prosperity and adversity they honored God, and God honored them.

The fact that these men, worshipers of Jehovah, were captives in Babylon, and that the vessels of God's house had been placed in the temple of the Babylonish gods, was boastfully cited by the victors as evidence that their religion and customs were superior to the religion and customs of

Seeing in the youthful Daniel promise of remarkable ability, Nebuchadnezzar appointed him for special training.

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the Hebrews. Yet through the very humiliations that Israel's departure from Him had invited, God gave Babylon evidence of His supremacy, of the holiness of His requirements, and of the sure results of obedience. And this testimony He gave, as alone it could be given, through those who were loyal to Him.

Among those who maintained their allegiance to God were Daniel and his three companions—illustrious examples of what men may become who unite with the God of wisdom and power. From the comparative simplicity of their Jewish home, these youth of royal line were taken to the most magnificent of cities and into the court of the world's greatest monarch. Nebuchadnezzar "spake unto Ashpenaz the master of his eunuchs, that he should bring certain of the children of Israel, and of the king's seed, and of the princes; children in whom was no blemish, but well favored, and skillful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king's palace. . . .

"Now among these were of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah." Seeing in these youth the promise of remarkable ability, Nebuchadnezzar determined that they should be trained to fill important positions in his kingdom. That they might be fully qualified for their lifework, he arranged for them to learn the language of the Chaldeans and for three years to be granted the unusual educational advantages afforded princes of the realm.

The names of Daniel and his companions were changed to names representing Chaldean deities. Great significance was attached to the names given by Hebrew parents to their

children. Often these stood for traits of character that the parent desired to see developed in the child. The prince in whose charge the captive youth were placed, "gave unto Daniel the name of Belteshazzar; and to Hananiah, of Shadrach; and to Mishael, of Meshach; and to Azariah, of Abednego."

The king did not compel the Hebrew youth to renounce their faith in favor of idolatry, but he hoped to bring this about gradually. By giving them names significant of idolatry, by bringing them daily into close association with idolatrous customs, and under the influence of the seductive rites of heathen worship, he hoped to induce them to renounce the religion of their nation and to unite with the worship of the Babylonians.

At the very outset of their career there came to them a decisive test of character. It was provided that they should eat of the food and drink of the wine that came from the king's table. In this the king thought to give them an expression of his favor and of his solicitude for their welfare. But a portion having been offered to idols, the food from the king's table was consecrated to idolatry; and one partaking of it would be regarded as offering homage to the gods of Babylon. In such homage, loyalty to Jehovah forbade Daniel and his companions to join. Even a mere pretense of eating the food or drinking the wine would be a denial of their faith. To do this would be to array themselves with heathenism and to dishonor the principles of the law of God.

Nor dared they risk the enervating effect of luxury and dissipation on physical, mental, and spiritual development. They were acquainted with the history of Nadab and Abihu,

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the record of whose intemperance and its results had been preserved in the parchments of the Pentateuch; and they knew that their own physical and mental power would be injuriously affected by the use of wine.

Daniel and his associates had been trained by their parents to habits of strict temperance. They had been taught that God would hold them accountable for their capabilities, and that they must never dwarf or enfeeble their powers. This education was to Daniel and his companions the means of their preservation amidst the demoralizing influences of the court of Babylon. Strong were the temptations surrounding them in that corrupt and luxurious court, but they remained uncontaminated. No power, no influence, could sway them from the principles they had learned in early life by a study of the word and works of God.

Had Daniel so desired, he might have found in his surroundings a plausible excuse for departing from strictly temperate habits. He might have argued that, dependent as he was on the king's favor and subject to his power, there was no other course for him to pursue than to eat of the king's food and drink of his wine; for should he adhere to the divine teaching, he would offend the king and probably lose his position and his life. Should he disregard the commandment of the Lord he would retain the favor of the king and secure for himself intellectual advantages and flattering worldly prospects.

But Daniel did not hesitate. The approval of God was dearer to him than the favor of the most powerful earthly potentate—dearer than life itself. He determined to stand firm in his integrity, let the result be what it might. He “pur-

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posed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank." And in this resolve he was supported by his three companions.

In reaching this decision, the Hebrew youth did not act presumptuously, but in firm reliance upon God. They did not choose to be singular, but they would be so rather than dishonor God. Should they compromise with wrong in this instance by yielding to the pressure of circumstances, their departure from principle would weaken their sense of right and their abhorrence of wrong. The first wrong step would lead to others, until, their connection with Heaven severed, they would be swept away by temptation.



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“God had brought Daniel into favor and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs,” and the request that he might not defile himself was received with respect. Yet the prince hesitated to grant it. “I fear my lord the king, who hath appointed your meat and your drink,” he explained to Daniel; “for why should he see your faces worse liking than the children which are of your sort? then shall ye make me endanger my head to the king.”

Daniel then appealed to Melzar, the officer in special charge of the Hebrew youth, requesting that they might be excused from eating the king’s meat and drinking his wine. He asked that the matter be tested by a ten days’ trial, the Hebrew youth during this time being supplied with simple food, while their companions ate of the king’s dainties.

Melzar, though fearful that by complying with this request he would incur the displeasure of the king, nevertheless consented; and Daniel knew that his case was won. At the end of the ten days’ trial the result was found to be the opposite of the prince’s fears. “Their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king’s meat.” In personal appearance the Hebrew youth showed a marked superiority over their companions. As a result, Daniel and his associates were permitted to continue their simple diet during their entire course of training.

For three years the Hebrew youth studied to acquire “the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans.” During this time they held fast their allegiance to God and depended constantly upon His power. With their habits of self-denial they united earnestness of purpose, diligence, and steadfastness. It

was not pride or ambition that had brought them into the king's court, into companionship with those who neither knew nor feared God; they were captives in a strange land, placed there by Infinite Wisdom. Separated from home influences and sacred associations, they sought to acquit themselves creditably, for the honor of their downtrodden people, and for the glory of Him whose servants they were.

The Lord regarded with approval the firmness and self-denial of the Hebrew youth, and their purity of motive; and His blessing attended them. He "gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams." The promise was fulfilled, "Them that honor Me I will honor." 1 Samuel 2:30. As Daniel clung to God with unwavering trust, the spirit of prophetic power came upon him. While receiving instruction from man in the duties of court life, he was being taught by God to read the mysteries of the future and to record for coming generations, through figures and symbols, events covering the history of this world till the close of time.

When the time came for the youth in training to be tested, the Hebrews were examined, with other candidates, for the service of the kingdom. But "among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah." Their keen comprehension, their wide knowledge, their choice and exact language, testified to the unimpaired strength and vigor of their mental powers. "In all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm;" "therefore stood they before the king."

At the court of Babylon were gathered representatives from

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all lands, men of the highest talent, men the most richly endowed with natural gifts, and possessed of the broadest culture that the world could bestow; yet among them all, the Hebrew youth were without a peer. In physical strength and beauty, in mental vigor and literary attainment, they stood unrivaled. The erect form, the firm, elastic step, the fair countenance, the undimmed senses, the untainted breath—all were so many certificates of good habits, insignia of the nobility with which nature honors those who are obedient to her laws.

In acquiring the wisdom of the Babylonians, Daniel and his companions were far more successful than their fellow students; but their learning did not come by chance. They obtained their knowledge by the faithful use of their powers, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. They placed themselves in connection with the Source of all wisdom, making the knowledge of God the foundation of their education. In faith they prayed for wisdom, and they lived their prayers. They placed themselves where God could bless them. They avoided that which would weaken their powers, and improved every opportunity to become intelligent in all lines of learning. They followed the rules of life that could not fail to give them strength of intellect. They sought to acquire knowledge for one purpose—that they might honor God. They realized that in order to stand as representatives of true religion amid the false religions of heathenism they must have clearness of intellect and must perfect a Christian character. And God Himself was their teacher. Constantly praying, conscientiously studying, keeping in touch with the Unseen, they walked with God as did Enoch.

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True success in any line of work is not the result of chance or accident or destiny. It is the outworking of God's providences, the reward of faith and discretion, of virtue and perseverance. Fine mental qualities and a high moral tone are not the result of accident. God gives opportunities; success depends upon the use made of them.

While God was working in Daniel and his companions "to will and to do of His good pleasure," they were working out their own salvation. Philippians 2:13. Herein is revealed the outworking of the divine principle of co-operation, without which no true success can be attained. Human effort avails nothing without divine power; and without human endeavor, divine effort is with many of no avail. To make God's grace our own, we must act our part. His grace is given to work in us to will and to do, but never as a substitute for our effort.



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As the Lord co-operated with Daniel and his fellows, so He will co-operate with all who strive to do His will. And by the impartation of His Spirit He will strengthen every true purpose, every noble resolution. Those who walk in the path of obedience will encounter many hindrances. Strong, subtle influences may bind them to the world; but the Lord is able to render futile every agency that works for the defeat of His chosen ones; in His strength they may overcome every temptation, conquer every difficulty.

God brought Daniel and his associates into connection with the great men of Babylon, that in the midst of a nation of idolaters they might represent His character. How did they become fitted for a position of so great trust and honor? It was faithfulness in little things that gave complexion to their whole life. They honored God in the smallest duties, as well as in the larger responsibilities.

As God called Daniel to witness for Him in Babylon, so He calls us to be His witnesses in the world today. In the smallest as well as the largest affairs of life, He desires us to reveal to men the principles of His kingdom. Many are waiting for some great work to be brought to them, while daily they lose opportunities for revealing faithfulness to God. Daily they fail of discharging with wholeheartedness the little duties of life. While they wait for some large work in which they may exercise supposedly great talents, and thus satisfy their ambitious longings, their days pass away.

In the life of the true Christian there are no nonessentials; in the sight of Omnipotence every duty is important. The Lord measures with exactness every possibility for service. The unused capabilities are just as much brought into account

as those that are used. We shall be judged by what we ought to have done, but did not accomplish because we did not use our powers to glorify God.

A noble character is not the result of accident; it is not due to special favors or endowments of Providence. It is the result of self-discipline, of subjection of the lower to the higher nature, of the surrender of self to the service of God and man.

Through the fidelity to the principles of temperance shown by the Hebrew youth God is speaking to the youth of today. There is need of men who like Daniel will do and dare for the cause of right. Pure hearts, strong hands, fearless courage, are needed; for the warfare between vice and virtue calls for ceaseless vigilance. To every soul Satan comes with temptation in many alluring forms on the point of indulgence of appetite.

The body is a most important medium through which the mind and the soul are developed for the upbuilding of character. Hence it is that the adversary of souls directs his temptations to the enfeebling and degrading of the physical powers. His success here often means the surrender of the whole being to evil. The tendencies of the physical nature, unless under the dominion of a higher power, will surely work ruin and death. The body is to be brought into subjection to the higher powers of the being. The passions are to be controlled by the will, which is itself to be under the control of God. The kingly power of reason, sanctified by divine grace, is to bear sway in the life. Intellectual power, physical stamina, and the length of life depend upon immutable laws. Through obedience to these laws, man may stand conqueror of him-

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self, conqueror of his own inclinations, conqueror of principalities and powers, of "the rulers of the darkness of this world," and of "spiritual wickedness in high places." Ephesians 6:12.

In that ancient ritual which is the gospel in symbol, no blemished offering could be brought to God's altar. The sacrifice that was to represent Christ must be spotless. The word of God points to this as an illustration of what His children are to be—"a living sacrifice" "holy and without blemish." Romans 12:1; Ephesians 5:27.

The Hebrew worthies were men of like passions with ourselves; yet, notwithstanding the seductive influences of the court of Babylon, they stood firm, because they depended upon a strength that is infinite. In them a heathen nation beheld an illustration of the goodness and beneficence of God, and of the love of Christ. And in their experience we have an instance of the triumph of principle over temptation, of purity over depravity, of devotion and loyalty over atheism and idolatry.

The spirit that possessed Daniel, the youth of today may have; they may draw from the same source of strength, possess the same power of self-control, and reveal the same grace in their lives, even under circumstances as unfavorable. Though surrounded by temptations to self-indulgence, especially in our large cities, where every form of sensual gratification is made easy and inviting, yet by divine grace their purpose to honor God may remain firm. Through strong resolution and vigilant watchfulness they may withstand every temptation that assails the soul. But only by him who determines to do right because it is right will the victory be gained.

IN THE COURT OF BABYLON

What a lifework was that of these noble Hebrews! As they bade farewell to their childhood home, little did they dream what a high destiny was to be theirs. Faithful and steadfast, they yielded to the divine guiding, so that through them God could fulfill His purpose.

The same mighty truths that were revealed through these men, God desires to reveal through the youth and children today. The life of Daniel and his fellows is a demonstration of what He will do for those who yield themselves to Him and with the whole heart seek to accomplish His purpose.

chapter 40

This chapter is based on Daniel 2.

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

SOON after Daniel and his companions entered the service of the king of Babylon, events occurred that revealed to an idolatrous nation the power and faithfulness of the God of Israel. Nebuchadnezzar had a remarkable dream, by which “his spirit was troubled, and his sleep brake from him.” But although the king’s mind was deeply impressed, he found it impossible, when he awoke, to recall the particulars.

In his perplexity, Nebuchadnezzar assembled his wise men—“the magicians, and the astrologers, and the sorcerers”—and besought their help. “I have dreamed a dream,” he said, “and my spirit was troubled to know the dream.” With this statement of his perplexity he requested them to reveal to him that which would bring relief to his mind.

To this the wise men responded, “O king, live forever: tell thy servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation.”

Dissatisfied with their evasive answer, and suspicious because, despite their pretentious claims to reveal the secrets of men, they nevertheless seemed unwilling to grant him help, the king commanded his wise men, with promises of wealth and honor on the one hand, and threats of death on the other, to tell him not only the interpretation of the dream, but the dream itself. "The thing is gone from me," he said; "if ye will not make known unto me the dream, with the interpretation thereof, ye shall be cut in pieces, and your houses shall be made a dunghill. But if ye show the dream, and the interpretation thereof, ye shall receive of me gifts and rewards and great honor."

Still the wise men returned the answer, "Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation of it."

Nebuchadnezzar, now thoroughly aroused and angered by the apparent perfidy of those in whom he had trusted, declared: "I know of certainty that ye would gain the time, because ye see the thing is gone from me. But if ye will not make known unto me the dream, there is but one decree for you: for ye have prepared lying and corrupt words to speak before me, till the time be changed: therefore tell me the dream, and I shall know that ye can show me the interpretation thereof."

Filled with fear for the consequences of their failure, the magicians endeavored to show the king that his request was unreasonable and his test beyond that which had ever been required of any man. "There is not a man upon the earth," they remonstrated, "that can show the king's matter: therefore there is no king, lord, nor ruler, that asked such things

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at any magician, or astrologer, or Chaldean. And it is a rare thing that the king requireth, and there is none other that can show it before the king, except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh.”

Then “the king was angry and very furious, and commanded to destroy all the wise men of Babylon.”

Among those sought for by the officers who were preparing to fulfill the provisions of the royal decree, were Daniel and his friends. When told that according to the decree they also must die, “with counsel and wisdom” Daniel inquired of Arioch, the captain of the king’s guard, “Why is the decree so hasty from the king?” Arioch told him the story of the king’s perplexity over his remarkable dream, and of his failure to secure help from those in whom he had hitherto placed fullest confidence. Upon hearing this, Daniel, taking his life in his hands, ventured into the king’s presence and begged that time be granted, that he might petition his God to reveal to him the dream and its interpretation.

To this request the monarch acceded. “Then Daniel went to his house, and made the thing known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions.” Together they sought for wisdom from the Source of light and knowledge. Their faith was strong in the consciousness that God had placed them where they were, that they were doing His work and meeting the demands of duty. In times of perplexity and danger they had always turned to Him for guidance and protection, and He had proved an ever-present help. Now with contrition of heart they submitted themselves anew to the Judge of the earth, pleading that He would grant them deliverance in this their time of special need. And they did not plead



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in vain. The God whom they had honored, now honored them. The Spirit of the Lord rested upon them, and to Daniel, "in a night vision," was revealed the king's dream and its meaning.

Daniel's first act was to thank God for the revelation given him. "Blessed be the name of God forever and ever," he exclaimed; "for wisdom and might are His: and He changeth the times and the seasons: He removeth kings, and setteth up kings: He giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding: He revealeth the deep and secret things: He knoweth what is in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with Him. I thank Thee, and praise Thee, O Thou God of my fathers, who hast given me wisdom and might, and hast made known unto me now what we desired of Thee: for Thou hast now made known unto us the king's matter."

Going immediately to Arioch, whom the king had commanded to destroy the wise men, Daniel said, "Destroy not the wise men of Babylon: bring me in before the king, and I will show unto the king the interpretation." Quickly the officer ushered Daniel in before the king, with the words, "I have found a man of the captives of Judah, that will make known unto the king the interpretation."

Behold the Jewish captive, calm and self-possessed, in the presence of the monarch of the world's most powerful empire. In his first words he disclaimed honor for himself and exalted God as the source of all wisdom. To the anxious inquiry of the king, "Art thou able to make known unto me the dream which I have seen, and the interpretation thereof?" he replied: "The secret which the king hath demanded cannot

The Image of Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

A MIGHTY prophecy of the kingdoms of men is the image of the dream of Nebuchadnezzar, the great and ambitious king of Babylon. He longed to know what should come to pass hereafter; and in the dream of the image, which no human could interpret, God made known what should come to pass.

God gave to Nebuchadnezzar, who believed that Babylon would stand forever, the dream. By His prophet He gave to Nebuchadnezzar the interpretation of the dream, that Nebuchadnezzar might know that Babylon would not stand forever, and that the king might learn that truth was more than the ambitions of imperialism. God gave the dream and its interpretation to Nebuchadnezzar, not alone that the Babylonian king might know, but that every king who followed him might know, that earthly kingdoms are all temporal at best, and must pass away, and that the only eternal kingdom, which shall never pass away, is the kingdom of Christ, represented by the stone which became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

The whole image of a man represented the kingdom of man; but the divisions of the image, the metallic symbols, represent the four great world-molding empires which from Daniel's time on would prevail on the earth. These begin with Babylonia, then at the height of its glory under Nebuchadnezzar, the kingdom pre-eminently which has molded the world. A. H. Sayce says: "In populousness and antiquity Assyria was far exceeded by the southern kingdom of Babylonia. Here were the center and starting point of the civilization which afterwards spread throughout Western Asia." —*The Ancient Empires of the East*, 1894 and 1900 eds., p. 93.

"In that country have been revealed the certain traces of the earliest advanced civilization yet discovered as well as that which had the longest continuous existence. . . . Babylonia . . . represented culture, civilization, literature, and the all-controlling power of religion." —Art. "Babylonia," *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* (New York, 1908), vol. 1, pp. 396, 397.

"No capital in the world has ever been the center of so much

power, wealth, and culture for a period so vast.”—Robert Wm. Rogers, *A History of Babylonia and Assyria*, 4th ed., vol. 1, p. 386.

It was fitting that the revelation and warning from God should be given to that great world-molding empire; but Babylonia, the great and golden, passed away under weaker rulers, Nabonidus and his son Belshazzar, in 539 B.C., in the same generation the revelation was given.

Babylonia was succeeded by Medo-Persia under Cyrus the Great. For about two hundred years Persia, symbolized by the silver of the image, sat on the throne of world empire.

In 331 B.C., Darius III (Codomannus) fought the issue of power with Alexander the Great at the battle of Arbela, and Alexander of Greece became the world's ruler. Grecia's symbol is the brass. Alexander died in 323 B.C.; and in a few years his kingdom was divided between warring factions and the century following hopelessly weakened and left a prey to the rising power of the emperor on the Tiber River.

Rome conquered the Syrian division of that formerly powerful Greek Empire in 190 B.C., the Macedonian division of that empire in 168 B.C., while Egypt acknowledged the authority of the iron monarchy of Rome in the same year. Rome was united in her beginning, although a republic. Later she became an empire. Into the Roman Empire came division, symbolized by the mixture of iron and clay, through the incursions of barbarians from the north and east of Europe in the fourth century; and Rome, the iron monarchy, became broken forever. There have been mighty efforts put forth to weld the nations of Europe, the divisions of Rome, into one homogenous whole by intermarriage, referred to in the prophecy as mingling themselves with the seed of men, but they have failed. Charlemagne and Napoleon sought by force of arms to build a united kingdom; but they failed. The prophecy declared that these divisions would not unite, even as iron cannot mix with clay. The word, “They shall not cleave one to another,” is stronger than diplomacy or force of arms.

In the days of the last divisions of Rome the God of heaven shall set up His kingdom, never to be destroyed, never to be given to another people than His own, who shall inhabit it forever. “And the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure.”

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the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, the soothsayers, show unto the king; but there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days.

"Thy dream," Daniel declared, "and the visions of thy head upon thy bed, are these; As for thee, O king, thy thoughts came into thy mind upon thy bed, what should come to pass hereafter: and He that revealeth secrets maketh known to thee what shall come to pass. But as for me, this secret is not revealed to me for any wisdom that I have more than any living, but for their sakes that shall make known the interpretation to the king, and that thou mightest know the thoughts of thy heart.

"Thou, O king, sawest, and behold a great image. This great image, whose brightness was excellent, stood before thee; and the form thereof was terrible. This image's head was of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass, his legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay.

"Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth.

"This is the dream," confidently declared Daniel; and the king, listening with closest attention to every particular, knew it was the very dream over which he had been so

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troubled. Thus his mind was prepared to receive with favor the interpretation. The King of kings was about to communicate great truth to the Babylonian monarch. God would reveal that He has power over the kingdoms of the world, power to enthrone and to dethrone kings. Nebuchadnezzar's mind was to be awakened, if possible, to a sense of his responsibility to Heaven. The events of the future, reaching down to the end of time, were to be opened before him.

"Thou, O king, art a king of kings," Daniel continued, "for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory. And wheresoever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and fowls of the heaven hath He given into thine hand, and hath made thee ruler over them all. Thou art this head of gold.

"And after thee shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee, and another third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth.

"And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron: foras-



much as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things: and as iron that breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise.

“And whereas thou sawest the feet and toes, part of potters’ clay, and part of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; but there shall be in it of the strength of the iron, forasmuch as thou sawest the iron mixed with miry clay. And as the toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken. And whereas thou sawest iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men: but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay.”

“In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure.”

The king was convinced of the truth of the interpretation, and in humility and awe he “fell upon his face, and worshiped,” saying, “Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, seeing thou couldst reveal this secret.”

Nebuchadnezzar revoked the decree for the destruction of the wise men. Their lives were spared because of Daniel’s connection with the Revealer of secrets. And “the king made

Daniel a great man, and gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon. Then Daniel requested of the king, and he set Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, over the affairs of the province of Babylon: but Daniel sat in the gate of the king."

In the annals of human history, the growth of nations, the rise and fall of empires, appear as if dependent on the will and prowess of man; the shaping of events seems, to a great degree, to be determined by his power, ambition, or caprice. But in the word of God the curtain is drawn aside, and we behold, above, behind, and through all the play and counterplay of human interest and power and passions, the agencies of the All-merciful One, silently, patiently working out the counsels of His own will.

In words of matchless beauty and tenderness, the apostle Paul set before the sages of Athens the divine purpose in the creation and distribution of races and nations. "God that made the world and all things therein," declared the apostle, "hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him." Acts 17:24-27.

God has made plain that whosoever will, may come "into the bond of the covenant." Ezekiel 20:37. In the creation it was His purpose that the earth should be inhabited by beings whose existence would be a blessing to themselves and to one another, and an honor to their Creator. All who will may identify themselves with this purpose. Of them it is

spoken, "This people have I formed for Myself; they shall show forth My praise." Isaiah 43:21.

In His law God has made known the principles that underlie all true prosperity, both of nations and of individuals. To the Israelites Moses declared of this law: "This is your wisdom and your understanding." "It is not a vain thing for you; because it is your life." Deuteronomy 4:6; 32:47. The blessings thus assured to Israel are, on the same conditions and in the same degree, assured to every nation and to every individual under the broad heavens.

Hundreds of years before certain nations came upon the stage of action, the Omniscient One looked down the ages and predicted the rise and fall of the universal kingdoms. God declared to Nebuchadnezzar that the kingdom of Babylon should fall, and a second kingdom would arise, which also would have its period of trial. Failing to exalt the true God, its glory would fade, and a third kingdom would occupy its place. This also would pass away; and a fourth, strong as iron, would subdue the nations of the world.

Had the rulers of Babylon—that richest of all earthly kingdoms—kept always before them the fear of Jehovah, they would have been given wisdom and power which would have bound them to Him and kept them strong. But they made God their refuge only when harassed and perplexed. At such times, failing to find help in their great men, they sought it from men like Daniel—men who they knew honored the living God and were honored by Him. To these men they appealed to unravel the mysteries of Providence; for though the rulers of proud Babylon were men of the highest intellect, they had separated themselves so far from God by transgres-

sion that they could not understand the revelations and the warnings given them concerning the future.

In the history of nations the student of God's word may behold the literal fulfillment of divine prophecy. Babylon, shattered and broken at last, passed away because in prosperity its rulers had regarded themselves as independent of God, and had ascribed the glory of their kingdom to human achievement. The Medo-Persian realm was visited by the wrath of Heaven because in it God's law had been trampled underfoot. The fear of the Lord had found no place in the hearts of the vast majority of the people. Wickedness, blasphemy, and corruption prevailed. The kingdoms that followed were even more base and corrupt; and these sank lower and still lower in the scale of moral worth.

The power exercised by every ruler on the earth is Heaven-imparted; and upon his use of the power thus bestowed, his success depends. To each the word of the divine Watcher is, "I girded thee, though thou hast not known Me." Isaiah 45:5. And to each the words spoken to Nebuchadnezzar of old are the lesson of life: "Break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor; if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity." Daniel 4:27.

To understand these things,—to understand that "righteousness exalteth a nation;" that "the throne is established by righteousness," and "upholden by mercy;" to recognize the outworking of these principles in the manifestation of His power who "removeth kings, and setteth up kings,"—this is to understand the philosophy of history. Proverbs 14:34; 16:12; 20:28; Daniel 2:21.

In the word of God only is this clearly set forth. Here

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it is shown that the strength of nations, as of individuals, is not found in the opportunities or facilities that appear to make them invincible; it is not found in their boasted greatness. It is measured by the fidelity with which they fulfill God's purpose.



chapter 41

This chapter is based on Daniel 3.

The Fiery Furnace

THE dream of the great image, opening before Nebuchadnezzar events reaching to the close of time, had been given that he might understand the part he was to act in the world's history, and the relation that his kingdom should sustain to the kingdom of heaven. In the interpretation of the dream, he had been plainly instructed regarding the establishment of God's everlasting kingdom. "In the days of these kings," Daniel had declared, "shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. . . . The dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure." Daniel 2:44, 45.

The king had acknowledged the power of God, saying to Daniel, "Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, . . . and a revealer of secrets." Verse 47. For a time afterward, Nebuchadnezzar was influenced by the fear of God; but his

The three Hebrew youth refused to bow before the golden image because of their staunch allegiance to the God of heaven.

heart was not yet cleansed from worldly ambition and a desire for self-exaltation. The prosperity attending his reign filled him with pride. In time he ceased to honor God, and resumed his idol worship with increased zeal and bigotry.

The words, "Thou art this head of gold," had made a deep impression upon the ruler's mind. Verse 38. The wise men of his realm, taking advantage of this and of his return to idolatry, proposed that he make an image similar to the one seen in his dream, and set it up where all might behold the head of gold, which had been interpreted as representing his kingdom.

Pleased with the flattering suggestion, he determined to carry it out, and to go even farther. Instead of reproducing the image as he had seen it, he would excel the original. His image should not deteriorate in value from the head to the feet, but should be entirely of gold—symbolic throughout of Babylon as an eternal, indestructible, all-powerful kingdom, which should break in pieces all other kingdoms and stand forever.

The thought of establishing the empire and a dynasty that should endure forever, appealed very strongly to the mighty ruler before whose arms the nations of earth had been unable to stand. With an enthusiasm born of boundless ambition and selfish pride, he entered into counsel with his wise men as to how to bring this about. Forgetting the remarkable providences connected with the dream of the great image; forgetting also that the God of Israel through His servant Daniel had made plain the significance of the image, and that in connection with this interpretation the great men of the realm had been saved an ignominious death; forgetting all except

their desire to establish their own power and supremacy, the king and his counselors of state determined that by every means possible they would endeavor to exalt Babylon as supreme, and worthy of universal allegiance.

The symbolic representation by which God had revealed to king and people His purpose for the nations of earth, was now to be made to serve for the glorification of human power. Daniel's interpretation was to be rejected and forgotten; truth was to be misinterpreted and misapplied. The symbol designed of Heaven to unfold to the minds of men important events of the future, was to be used to hinder the spread of the knowledge that God desired the world to receive. Thus through the devisings of ambitious men, Satan was seeking to thwart the divine purpose for the human race. The enemy of mankind knew that truth unmixed with error is a power mighty to save; but that when used to exalt self and to further the projects of men, it becomes a power for evil.

From his rich store of treasure, Nebuchadnezzar caused to be made a great golden image, similar in its general features to that which had been seen in vision, save in the one particular of the material of which it was composed. Accustomed as they were to magnificent representations of their heathen deities, the Chaldeans had never before produced anything so imposing and majestic as this resplendent statue, threescore cubits in height and six cubits in breadth. And it is not surprising that in a land where idol worship was of universal prevalence, the beautiful and priceless image on the plain of Dura, representing the glory of Babylon and its magnificence and power, should be consecrated as an object of worship. This was accordingly provided for, and a decree

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went forth that on the day of the dedication all should show their supreme loyalty to the Babylonian power by bowing before the image.

The appointed day came, and a vast concourse from all “people, nations, and languages,” assembled on the plain of Dura. In harmony with the king’s command, when the sound of music was heard, the whole company “fell down and worshiped the golden image.” On that eventful day the powers of darkness seemed to be gaining a signal triumph; the worship of the golden image bade fair to become connected permanently with the established forms of idolatry recognized as the state religion of the land. Satan hoped thereby to defeat God’s purpose of making the presence of captive Israel in Babylon a means of blessing to all the nations of heathendom.

But God decreed otherwise. Not all had bowed the knee to the idolatrous symbol of human power. In the midst of the worshipping multitude there were three men who were firmly resolved not thus to dishonor the God of heaven. Their God was King of kings and Lord of lords; they would bow to none other.

To Nebuchadnezzar, flushed with triumph, was brought the word that among his subjects there were some who dared disobey his mandate. Certain of the wise men, jealous of the honors that had been bestowed upon the faithful companions of Daniel, now reported to the king their flagrant violation of his wishes. “O king, live forever,” they exclaimed. “There are certain Jews whom thou hast set over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; these men, O king, have not regarded thee: they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.”

The king commanded that the men be brought before him. "Is it true," he inquired, "do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up?" He endeavored by threats to induce them to unite with the multitude. Pointing to the fiery furnace, he reminded them of the punishment awaiting them if they should persist in their refusal to obey his will. But firmly the Hebrews testified to their allegiance to the God of heaven, and their faith in His power to deliver. The act of bowing to the image was understood by all to be an act of worship. Such homage they could render to God alone.

As the three Hebrews stood before the king, he was convinced that they possessed something the other wise men of his kingdom did not have. They had been faithful in the performance of every duty. He would give them another trial. If only they would signify their willingness to unite with the multitude in worshipping the image, all would be well with them; "but if ye worship not," he added, "ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace." Then with his hand stretched upward in defiance, he demanded, "Who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?"

In vain were the king's threats. He could not turn the men from their allegiance to the Ruler of the universe. From the history of their fathers they had learned that disobedience to God results in dishonor, disaster, and death; and that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, the foundation of all true prosperity. Calmly facing the furnace, they said, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so [if this is your decision], our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery

furnace, and He will deliver us out of thine hand, O king.” Their faith strengthened as they declared that God would be glorified by delivering them, and with triumphant assurance born of implicit trust in God, they added, “But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.”

The king’s wrath knew no bounds. “Full of fury,” “the form of his visage was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego,” representatives of a despised and captive race. Directing that the furnace be heated seven times hotter than its wont, he commanded the mighty men of his army to bind the worshipers of Israel’s God, preparatory to summary execution.

“Then these men were bound in their coats, their hosen, and their hats, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Therefore because the king’s commandment was urgent, and the furnace exceeding hot, the flame of the fire slew those men that took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.”

But the Lord did not forget His own. As His witnesses were cast into the furnace, the Saviour revealed Himself to them in person, and together they walked in the midst of the fire. In the presence of the Lord of heat and cold, the flames lost their power to consume.

From his royal seat the king looked on, expecting to see the men who had defied him utterly destroyed. But his feelings of triumph suddenly changed. The nobles standing near saw his face grow pale as he started from the throne and looked intently into the glowing flames. In alarm the king, turning to his lords, asked, “Did not we cast three men bound

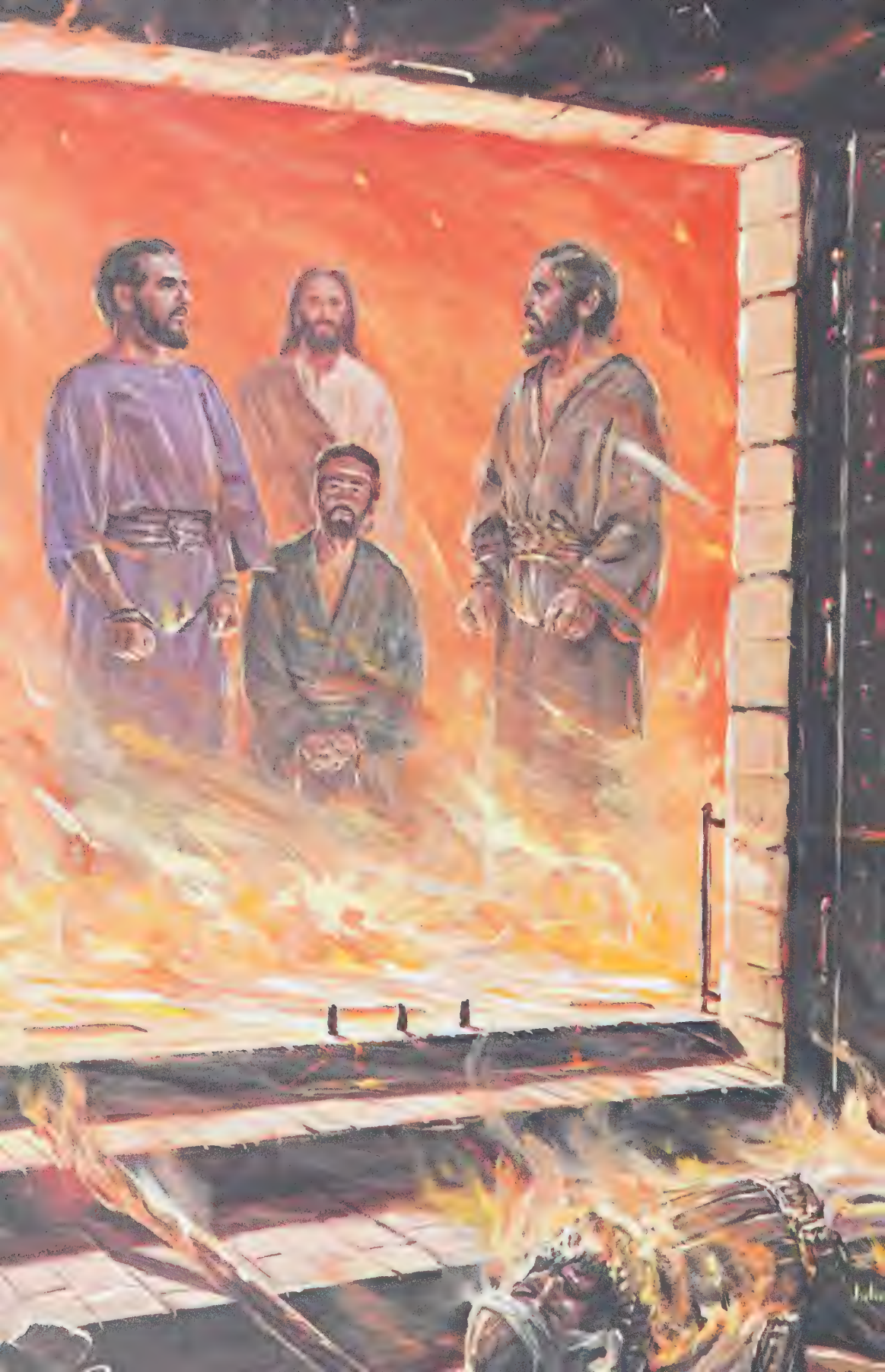
into the midst of the fire? . . . Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God."

How did that heathen king know what the Son of God was like? The Hebrew captives filling positions of trust in Babylon had in life and character represented before him the truth. When asked for a reason of their faith, they had given it without hesitation. Plainly and simply they had presented the principles of righteousness, thus teaching those around them of the God whom they worshiped. They had told of Christ, the Redeemer to come; and in the form of the fourth in the midst of the fire the king recognized the Son of God.

And now, his own greatness and dignity forgotten, Nebuchadnezzar descended from his throne and, going to the mouth of the furnace, cried out, "Ye servants of the most high God, come forth, and come hither."

Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came forth before the vast multitude, showing themselves unhurt. The presence of their Saviour had guarded them from harm, and only their fetters had been burned. "And the princes, governors, and captains, and the king's counselors, being gathered together, saw these men, upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them."

Forgotten was the great golden image, set up with such pomp. In the presence of the living God, men feared and trembled. "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego," the humbled king was constrained to acknowledge, "who hath sent His angel, and delivered His servants



that trusted in Him, and have changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God."

The experiences of that day led Nebuchadnezzar to issue a decree, "that every people, nation, and language, which speak anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill." "There is no other god," he urged as the reason for the decree, "that can deliver after this sort."

In these and like words the king of Babylon endeavored to spread abroad before all the peoples of earth his conviction that the power and authority of the God of the Hebrews was worthy of supreme adoration. And God was pleased with the effort of the king to show Him reverence, and to make the royal confession of allegiance as widespread as was the Babylonian realm.

It was right for the king to make public confession, and to seek to exalt the God of heaven above all other gods; but in endeavoring to force his subjects to make a similar confession of faith and to show similar reverence, Nebuchadnezzar was exceeding his right as a temporal sovereign. He had no more right, either civil or moral, to threaten men with death for not worshiping God, than he had to make the decree consigning to the flames all who refused to worship the golden image. God never compels the obedience of man. He leaves all free to choose whom they will serve.

By the deliverance of His faithful servants, the Lord declared that He takes His stand with the oppressed, and rebukes all earthly powers that rebel against the authority of Heaven. The three Hebrews declared to the whole nation of Babylon

"Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire . . . ; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God."

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their faith in Him whom they worshiped. They relied on God. In the hour of their trial they remembered the promise, "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." Isaiah 43:2. And in a marvelous manner their faith in the living Word had been honored in the sight of all. The tidings of their wonderful deliverance were carried to many countries by the representatives of the different nations that had been invited by Nebuchadnezzar to the dedication. Through the faithfulness of His children, God was glorified in all the earth.

Important are the lessons to be learned from the experience of the Hebrew youth on the plain of Dura. In this our day, many of God's servants, though innocent of wrongdoing, will be given over to suffer humiliation and abuse at the hands of those who, inspired by Satan, are filled with envy and religious bigotry. Especially will the wrath of man be aroused against those who hallow the Sabbath of the fourth commandment; and at last a universal decree will denounce these as deserving of death.

The season of distress before God's people will call for a faith that will not falter. His children must make it manifest that He is the only object of their worship, and that no consideration, not even that of life itself, can induce them to make the least concession to false worship. To the loyal heart the commands of sinful, finite men will sink into insignificance beside the word of the eternal God. Truth will be obeyed though the result be imprisonment or exile or death.

As in the days of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, so

THE FIERY FURNACE

in the closing period of earth's history the Lord will work mightily in behalf of those who stand steadfastly for the right. He who walked with the Hebrew worthies in the fiery furnace will be with His followers wherever they are. His abiding presence will comfort and sustain. In the midst of the time of trouble—trouble such as has not been since there was a nation—His chosen ones will stand unmoved. Satan with all the hosts of evil cannot destroy the weakest of God's saints. Angels that excel in strength will protect them, and in their behalf Jehovah will reveal Himself as a "God of gods," able to save to the uttermost those who have put their trust in Him.



chapter 42

This chapter is based on Daniel 4.

True Greatness

EXALTED to the pinnacle of worldly honor, and acknowledged even by Inspiration as “a king of kings” (Ezekiel 26:7), Nebuchadnezzar nevertheless at times had ascribed to the favor of Jehovah the glory of his kingdom and the splendor of his reign. Such had been the case after his dream of the great image. His mind had been profoundly influenced by this vision and by the thought that the Babylonian Empire, universal though it was, was finally to fall, and other kingdoms were to bear sway, until at last all earthly powers were to be superseded by a kingdom set up by the God of heaven, which kingdom was never to be destroyed.

Nebuchadnezzar’s noble conception of God’s purpose concerning the nations was lost sight of later in his experience; yet when his proud spirit was humbled before the multitude on the plain of Dura, he once more had acknowledged that God’s kingdom is “an everlasting kingdom, and His dominion is from generation to generation.” An idolater by birth and

As King Nebuchadnezzar looked at the
glories of mighty Babylon, pride filled
his heart, and he forgot his Maker.

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training, and at the head of an idolatrous people, he had nevertheless an innate sense of justice and right, and God was able to use him as an instrument for the punishment of the rebellious and for the fulfillment of the divine purpose. "The terrible of the nations" (Ezekiel 28:7), it was given Nebuchadnezzar, after years of patient and wearing labor, to conquer Tyre; Egypt also fell a prey to his victorious armies; and as he added nation after nation to the Babylonian realm, he added more and more to his fame as the greatest ruler of the age.

It is not surprising that the successful monarch, so ambitious and so proud-spirited, should be tempted to turn aside from the path of humility, which alone leads to true greatness. In the intervals between his wars of conquest he gave much thought to the strengthening and beautifying of his capital, until at length the city of Babylon became the chief glory of his kingdom, "the golden city," "the praise of the whole earth." His passion as a builder, and his signal success in making Babylon one of the wonders of the world, ministered to his pride, until he was in grave danger of spoiling his record as a wise ruler whom God could continue to use as an instrument for the carrying out of the divine purpose.

In mercy God gave the king another dream, to warn him of his peril and of the snare that had been laid for his ruin. In a vision of the night, Nebuchadnezzar saw a great tree growing in the midst of the earth, its top towering to the heavens and its branches stretching to the ends of the earth. Flocks and herds from the mountains and hills enjoyed shelter beneath its shadow, and the birds of the air built their nests in its boughs. "The leaves thereof were fair, and the fruit

thereof much, and in it was meat for all: . . . and all flesh was fed of it."

As the king gazed upon the lofty tree, he beheld "a Watcher," even "an Holy One," who approached the tree and in a loud voice cried:

"Hew down the tree, and cut off his branches, shake off his leaves, and scatter his fruit: let the beasts get away from under it, and the fowls from his branches: nevertheless leave the stump of his roots in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field; and let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts in the grass of the earth: let his heart be changed from man's, and let a beast's heart be given unto him; and let seven times pass over him. This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the Most High ruleth in the



kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will, and setteth up over it the basest of men."

Greatly troubled by the dream, which was evidently a prediction of adversity, the king repeated it to "the magicians, the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers;" but although the dream was very explicit, none of the wise men could interpret it.

Once more in this idolatrous nation, testimony was to be borne to the fact that only those who love and fear God can understand the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. The king in his perplexity sent for his servant Daniel, a man esteemed for his integrity and constancy and for his unrivaled wisdom.

When Daniel, in response to the royal summons, stood in the king's presence, Nebuchadnezzar said, "O Belteshazzar, master of the magicians, because I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in thee, and no secret troubleth thee, tell me the visions of my dream that I have seen, and the interpretation thereof." After relating the dream, Nebuchadnezzar said: "O Belteshazzar, declare the interpretation thereof, forasmuch as all the wise men of my kingdom are not able to make known unto me the interpretation: but thou art able; for the spirit of the holy gods is in thee."

To Daniel the meaning of the dream was plain, and its significance startled him. He "was astonished for one hour, and his thoughts troubled him." Seeing Daniel's hesitation and distress, the king expressed sympathy for his servant. "Belteshazzar," he said, "let not the dream, or the interpretation thereof, trouble thee."

"My lord," Daniel answered, "the dream be to them that

hate thee, and the interpretation thereof to thine enemies.” The prophet realized that upon him God had laid the solemn duty of revealing to Nebuchadnezzar the judgment that was about to fall upon him because of his pride and arrogance. Daniel must interpret the dream in language the king could understand; and although its dreadful import had made him hesitate in dumb amazement, yet he must state the truth, whatever the consequences to himself.

Then Daniel made known the mandate of the Almighty. “The tree that thou sawest,” he said, “which grew, and was strong, whose height reached unto the heaven, and the sight thereof to all the earth; whose leaves were fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it was meat for all; under which the beasts of the field dwelt, and upon whose branches the fowls of the heaven had their habitation: it is thou, O king, that art grown and become strong: for thy greatness is grown, and reacheth unto heaven, and thy dominion to the end of the earth.

“And whereas the king saw a Watcher and an Holy One coming down from heaven, and saying, Hew the tree down, and destroy it; yet leave the stump of the roots thereof in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field; and let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts of the field, till seven times pass over him; this is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the Most High, which is come upon my lord the king: that they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and they shall wet thee with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over thee, till

thou know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will. And whereas they commanded to leave the stump of the tree roots; thy kingdom shall be sure unto thee, after that thou shalt have known that the Heavens do rule."

Having faithfully interpreted the dream, Daniel urged the proud monarch to repent and turn to God, that by rightdoing he might avert the threatened calamity. "O king," the prophet pleaded, "let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor; if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity."

For a time the impression of the warning and the counsel of the prophet was strong upon Nebuchadnezzar; but the heart that is not transformed by the grace of God soon loses the impressions of the Holy Spirit. Self-indulgence and ambition had not yet been eradicated from the king's heart, and later on these traits reappeared. Notwithstanding the instruction so graciously given him, and the warnings of past experience, Nebuchadnezzar again allowed himself to be controlled by a spirit of jealousy against the kingdoms that were to follow. His rule, which heretofore had been to a great degree just and merciful, became oppressive. Hardening his heart, he used his God-given talents for self-glorification, exalting himself above the God who had given him life and power.

For months the judgment of God lingered. But instead of being led to repentance by this forbearance, the king indulged his pride until he lost confidence in the interpretation of the dream, and jested at his former fears.

TRUE GREATNESS

A year from the time he had received the warning, Nebuchadnezzar, walking in his palace and thinking with pride of his power as a ruler and of his success as a builder, exclaimed, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty?"

While the proud boast was yet on the king's lips, a voice from heaven announced that God's appointed time of judgment had come. Upon his ears fell the mandate of Jehovah: "O King Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; The kingdom is departed from thee. And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will."

In a moment the reason that God had given him was taken away; the judgment that the king thought perfect, the wisdom on which he prided himself, was removed, and the once mighty ruler was a maniac. His hand could no longer sway



the scepter. The messages of warning had been unheeded; now, stripped of the power his Creator had given him, and driven from men, Nebuchadnezzar “did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles’ feathers, and his nails like birds’ claws.”

For seven years Nebuchadnezzar was an astonishment to all his subjects; for seven years he was humbled before all the world. Then his reason was restored and, looking up in humility to the God of heaven, he recognized the divine hand in his chastisement. In a public proclamation he acknowledged his guilt and the great mercy of God in his restoration. “At the end of the days,” he said, “I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the Most High, and I praised and honored Him that liveth forever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation: and all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou?”

“At the same time my reason returned unto me; and for the glory of my kingdom, mine honor and brightness returned unto me; and my counselors and my lords sought unto me; and I was established in my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added unto me.”

The once proud monarch had become a humble child of God; the tyrannical, overbearing ruler, a wise and compassionate king. He who had defied and blasphemed the God of heaven, now acknowledged the power of the Most High

and earnestly sought to promote the fear of Jehovah and the happiness of his subjects. Under the rebuke of Him who is King of kings and Lord of lords, Nebuchadnezzar had learned at last the lesson which all rulers need to learn—that true greatness consists in true goodness. He acknowledged Jehovah as the living God, saying, “I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and His ways judgment: and those that walk in pride He is able to abase.”

God’s purpose that the greatest kingdom in the world should show forth His praise was now fulfilled. This public proclamation, in which Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged the mercy and goodness and authority of God, was the last act of his life recorded in sacred history.



chapter 43

This chapter is based on Daniel 5.

The Unseen Watcher

TOWARD the close of Daniel's life great changes were taking place in the land to which, over threescore years before, he and his Hebrew companions had been carried captive. Nebuchadnezzar, "the terrible of the nations" (Ezekiel 28:7), had died, and Babylon, "the praise of the whole earth" (Jeremiah 51:41), had passed under the unwise rule of his successors, and gradual but sure dissolution was resulting.

Through the folly and weakness of Belshazzar, the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, proud Babylon was soon to fall. Admitted in his youth to a share in kingly authority, Belshazzar gloried in his power and lifted up his heart against the God of heaven. Many had been his opportunities to know the divine will and to understand his responsibility of rendering obedience thereto. He had known of his grandfather's banishment, by the decree of God, from the society of men; and he was familiar with Nebuchadnezzar's conversion and

Proud and arrogant, King Belshazzar
banqueted with his lords, drinking wine
from vessels taken from Jerusalem.

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JOHN STEEL, ARTIST

miraculous restoration. But Belshazzar allowed the love of pleasure and self-glorification to efface the lessons that he should never have forgotten. He wasted the opportunities graciously granted him, and neglected to use the means within his reach for becoming more fully acquainted with truth. That which Nebuchadnezzar had finally gained at the cost of untold suffering and humiliation, Belshazzar passed by with indifference.

It was not long before reverses came. Babylon was besieged by Cyrus, nephew of Darius the Mede, and commanding general of the combined armies of the Medes and Persians. But within the seemingly impregnable fortress, with its massive walls and its gates of brass, protected by the river Euphrates, and stocked with provision in abundance, the voluptuous monarch felt safe and passed his time in mirth and revelry.

In his pride and arrogance, with a reckless feeling of security, Belshazzar "made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine before the thousand." All the attractions that wealth and power could command, added splendor to the scene. Beautiful women with their enchantments were among the guests in attendance at the royal banquet. Men of genius and education were there. Princes and statesmen drank wine like water and reveled under its maddening influence.

With reason dethroned through shameless intoxication, and with lower impulses and passions now in the ascendancy, the king himself took the lead in the riotous orgy. As the feast progressed, he "commanded to bring the golden and silver vessels which . . . Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem; that the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, might drink therein."

The king would prove that nothing was too sacred for his hands to handle. "They brought the golden vessels; . . . and the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, drank in them. They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone."

Little did Belshazzar think that there was a heavenly Witness to his idolatrous revelry; that a divine Watcher, unrecognized, looked upon the scene of profanation, heard the sacrilegious mirth, beheld the idolatry. But soon the uninvited Guest made His presence felt. When the revelry was at its height a bloodless hand came forth and traced upon the walls of the palace characters that gleamed like fire—words which, though unknown to the vast throng, were a portent of doom to the now conscience-stricken king and his guests.

Hushed was the boisterous mirth, while men and women, seized with nameless terror, watched the hand slowly tracing the mysterious characters. Before them passed, as in panoramic view, the deeds of their evil lives; they seemed to be arraigned before the judgment bar of the eternal God, whose power they had just defied. Where but a few moments before had been hilarity and blasphemous witticism, were pallid faces and cries of fear. When God makes men fear, they cannot hide the intensity of their terror.

Belshazzar was the most terrified of them all. He it was who above all others had been responsible for the rebellion against God which that night had reached its height in the Babylonian realm. In the presence of the unseen Watcher, the representative of Him whose power had been challenged and whose name had been blasphemed, the king was paralyzed with fear. Conscience was awakened. "The joints of

his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another." Belshazzar had impiously lifted himself up against the God of heaven and had trusted in his own might, not supposing that any would dare say, "Why doest thou thus?" but now he realized that he must render an account of the stewardship entrusted him, and that for his wasted opportunities and his defiant attitude he could offer no excuse.

In vain the king tried to read the burning letters. But here was a secret he could not fathom, a power he could neither understand nor gainsay. In despair he turned to the wise men of his realm for help. His wild cry rang out in the assembly, calling upon the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers to read the writing. "Whosoever shall read this writing," he promised, "and show me the interpretation thereof, shall be clothed with scarlet, and have a chain of gold about his neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom." But of no avail was his appeal to his trusted advisers, with offers of rich awards. Heavenly wisdom cannot be bought or sold. "All the king's wise men . . . could not read the writing, nor make known to the king the interpretation thereof." They were no more able to read the mysterious characters than had been the wise men of a former generation to interpret the dreams of Nebuchadnezzar.

Then the queen mother remembered Daniel, who, over half a century before, had made known to King Nebuchadnezzar the dream of the great image and its interpretation. "O king, live forever," she said. "Let not thy thoughts trouble thee, nor let thy countenance be changed: there is a man in thy kingdom, in whom is the spirit of the holy gods; and in the days of thy father light and understanding and wisdom,

like the wisdom of the gods, was found in him; whom the king Nebuchadnezzar . . . made master of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers; forasmuch as an excellent spirit, and knowledge, and understanding, interpreting of dreams, and showing of hard sentences, and dissolving of doubts, were found in the same Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar: now let Daniel be called, and he will show the interpretation.

"Then was Daniel brought in before the king." Making an effort to regain his composure, Belshazzar said to the prophet: "Art thou that Daniel, which art of the children of the captivity of Judah, whom the king my father brought out of Jewry? I have even heard of thee, that the spirit of the gods is in thee, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom is found in thee. And now the wise men, the astrologers, have been brought in before me, that they should read this writing, and make known unto me the interpretation thereof: but they could not show the interpretation of the thing: and I have heard of thee, that thou canst make interpretations, and dissolve doubts: now if thou canst read the writing, and make known to me the interpretation thereof, thou shalt be clothed with scarlet, and have a chain of gold about thy neck, and shalt be the third ruler in the kingdom."

Before that terror-stricken throng, Daniel, unmoved by the promises of the king, stood in the quiet dignity of a servant of the Most High, not to speak words of flattery, but to interpret a message of doom. "Let thy gifts be to thyself," he said, "and give thy rewards to another; yet I will read the writing unto the king, and make known to him the interpretation."

The prophet first reminded Belshazzar of matters with



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Julius G. G.

which he was familiar, but which had not taught him the lesson of humility that might have saved him. He spoke of Nebuchadnezzar's sin and fall, and of the Lord's dealings with him—the dominion and glory bestowed upon him, the divine judgment for his pride, and his subsequent acknowledgment of the power and mercy of the God of Israel; and then in bold and emphatic words he rebuked Belshazzar for his wickedness. He held the king's sin up before him, showing him the lessons he might have learned but did not. Belshazzar had not read aright the experience of his grandfather, nor heeded the warning of events so significant to himself. The opportunity of knowing and obeying the true God had been given him, but had not been taken to heart, and he was about to reap the consequence of his rebellion.

"Thou, . . . O Belshazzar," the prophet declared, "hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this; but hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of His house before thee, and thou, and thy lords, thy wives, and thy concubines, have drunk wine in them; and thou hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know: and the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified: then was the part of the hand sent from Him; and this writing was written."

Turning to the Heaven-sent message on the wall, the prophet read, "MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN." The hand that had traced the characters was no longer visible, but these four words were still gleaming forth with terrible distinctness; and now with bated breath the people listened while the aged prophet declared:

While the courtiers drank and reveled,
a mysterious hand appeared and wrote
the doom of Babylon on the palace wall.

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JOHN STEEL, ARTIST

PROPHETS AND KINGS

“This is the interpretation of the thing: MENE; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. PERES; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.”

In that last night of mad folly, Belshazzar and his lords had filled up the measure of their guilt and the guilt of the Chaldean kingdom. No longer could God's restraining hand ward off the impending evil. Through manifold providences, God had sought to teach them reverence for His law. “We would have healed Babylon,” He declared of those whose judgment was now reaching unto heaven, “but she is not healed.” Jeremiah 51:9. Because of the strange perversity of the human heart, God had at last found it necessary to pass the irrevocable sentence. Belshazzar was to fall, and his kingdom was to pass into other hands.

As the prophet ceased speaking, the king commanded that he be awarded the promised honors; and in harmony with this, “they clothed Daniel with scarlet, and put a chain of gold about his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.”

More than a century before, Inspiration had foretold that “the night of . . . pleasure” during which king and counselors would vie with one another in blasphemy against God, would suddenly be changed into a season of fear and destruction. And now, in rapid succession, momentous events followed one another exactly as had been portrayed in the prophetic scriptures years before the principals in the drama had been born.

— While still in the festal hall, surrounded by those whose

THE UNSEEN WATCHER

doom had been sealed, the king is informed by a messenger that "his city is taken" by the enemy against whose devices he had felt so secure; "that the passages are stopped, . . . and the men of war are affrighted." Verses 31, 32. Even while he and his nobles were drinking from the sacred vessels of Jehovah, and praising their gods of silver and of gold, the Medes and the Persians, having turned the Euphrates out of its channel, were marching into the heart of the unguarded city. The army of Cyrus now stood under the walls of the palace; the city was filled with the soldiers of the enemy, "as with caterpillars" (verse 14); and their triumphant shouts could be heard above the despairing cries of the astonished revelers.

"In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain," and an alien monarch sat upon the throne.

Clearly had the Hebrew prophets spoken concerning the manner in which Babylon should fall. As in vision God had revealed to them the events of the future, they had exclaimed: "How is Sheshach taken! and how is the praise of the whole earth surprised! how is Babylon become an astonishment



among the nations!" "How is the hammer of the whole earth cut asunder and broken! how is Babylon become a desolation among the nations!" "At the noise of the taking of Babylon the earth is moved, and the cry is heard among the nations."

"Babylon is suddenly fallen and destroyed." "The spoiler is come upon her, even upon Babylon, and her mighty men are taken, every one of their bows is broken: for the Lord God of recompenses shall surely requite. And I will make drunk her princes, and her wise men, her captains, and her rulers, and her mighty men: and they shall sleep a perpetual sleep, and not wake, saith the King, whose name is the Lord of hosts."

"I have laid a snare for thee, and thou art also taken, O Babylon, and thou wast not aware: thou art found, and also caught, because thou hast striven against the Lord. The Lord hath opened His armory, and hath brought forth the weapons of His indignation: for this is the work of the Lord God of hosts in the land of the Chaldeans."

"Thus saith the Lord of hosts; The children of Israel and the children of Judah were oppressed together: and all that took them captives held them fast; they refused to let them go. Their Redeemer is strong; the Lord of hosts is His name: He shall thoroughly plead their cause, that He may give rest to the land, and disquiet the inhabitants of Babylon." Jeremiah 51:41; 50:23, 46; 51:8, 56, 57; 50:24, 25, 33, 34.

Thus "the broad walls of Babylon" became "utterly broken, and her high gates . . . burned with fire." Thus did Jehovah of hosts "cause the arrogancy of the proud to cease," and lay low "the haughtiness of the terrible." Thus did "Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency,"

become as Sodom and Gomorrah—a place forever accursed. “It shall never be inhabited,” Inspiration has declared, “neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall the shepherds make their fold there. But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there; and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures; and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there. And the wild beasts of the islands shall cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant palaces.” “I will also make it a possession for the bittern, and pools of water: and I will sweep it with the besom of destruction, saith the Lord of hosts.” Jeremiah 51:58; Isaiah 13:11, 19-22; 14:23.

To the last ruler of Babylon, as in type to its first, had come the sentence of the divine Watcher: “O king, . . . to thee it is spoken; The kingdom is departed from thee.” Daniel 4:31.

“Come down, and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of
Babylon,
Sit on the ground: there is no throne. . . .
Sit thou silent,
And get thee into darkness, O daughter of the Chaldeans:
For thou shalt no more be called, The lady of kingdoms.

“I was wroth with My people,
I have polluted Mine inheritance, and given them into
thine hand:
Thou didst show them no mercy; . . .

“And thou saidst, I shall be a lady forever:
So that thou didst not lay these things to thy heart,
Neither didst remember the latter end of it.

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“Therefore hear now this,
Thou that art given to pleasures,
That dwellest carelessly,
That sayest in thine heart,
I am, and none else beside me;
I shall not sit as a widow,
Neither shall I know the loss of children: . . .

“These two things shall come to thee in a moment in
one day,
The loss of children, and widowhood:
They shall come upon thee in their perfection for the
multitude of thy sorceries, and for the great
abundance of thine enchantments.
For thou hast trusted in thy wickedness:
Thou hast said, None seeth me.

“Thy wisdom and thy knowledge, it hath perverted thee;
And thou hast said in thine heart,
I am, and none else beside me.
Therefore shall evil come upon thee;
Thou shalt not know from whence it riseth:
And mischief shall fall upon thee;
Thou shalt not be able to put it off:
And desolation shall come upon thee suddenly, which
thou shalt not know.

“Stand now with thine enchantments, and with the
multitude of thy sorceries, wherein thou hast
labored from thy youth;
If so be thou shalt be able to profit,
If so be thou mayest prevail.

“Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counsels.
Let now the astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly
prognosticators,
Stand up, and save thee from these things that shall come
upon thee.

Behold, they shall be as stubble; . . .

They shall not deliver themselves from the power of the
flame: . . .

None shall save thee." Isaiah 47:1-15.

Every nation that has come upon the stage of action has been permitted to occupy its place on the earth, that the fact might be determined whether it would fulfill the purposes of the Watcher and the Holy One. Prophecy has traced the rise and progress of the world's great empires—Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. With each of these, as with the nations of less power, history has repeated itself. Each has had its period of test; each has failed, its glory faded, its power departed.

While nations have rejected God's principles, and in this rejection have wrought their own ruin, yet a divine, overruling purpose has manifestly been at work throughout the ages. It was this that the prophet Ezekiel saw in the wonderful representation given him during his exile in the land of the Chaldeans, when before his astonished gaze were portrayed the symbols that revealed an overruling Power that has to do with the affairs of earthly rulers.

Upon the banks of the river Chebar, Ezekiel beheld a whirlwind seeming to come from the north, "a great cloud, and a fire infolding itself, and a brightness was about it, and out of the midst thereof as the color of amber." A number of wheels intersecting one another were moved by four living beings. High above all these "was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone: and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it." "And there appeared in the cherubims the

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form of a man's hand under their wings." Ezekiel 1:4, 26; 10:8. The wheels were so complicated in arrangement that at first sight they appeared to be in confusion; yet they moved in perfect harmony. Heavenly beings, sustained and guided by the hand beneath the wings of the cherubim, were impelling those wheels; above them, upon the sapphire throne, was the Eternal One; and round about the throne was a rainbow, the emblem of divine mercy.

As the wheellike complications were under the guidance of the hand beneath the wings of the cherubim, so the complicated play of human events is under divine control. Amidst the strife and tumult of nations He that sitteth above the cherubim still guides the affairs of this earth.

The history of nations speaks to us today. To every nation



and to every individual God has assigned a place in His great plan. Today men and nations are being tested by the plummet in the hand of Him who makes no mistake. All are by their own choice deciding their destiny, and God is overruling all for the accomplishment of His purposes.

The prophecies which the great I AM has given in His word, uniting link after link in the chain of events, from eternity in the past to eternity in the future, tell us where we are today in the procession of the ages and what may be expected in the time to come. All that prophecy has foretold as coming to pass, until the present time, has been traced on the pages of history, and we may be assured that all which is yet to come will be fulfilled in its order.

Today the signs of the times declare that we are standing on the threshold of great and solemn events. Everything in our world is in agitation. Before our eyes is fulfilling the Saviour's prophecy of the events to precede His coming: "Ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars. . . . Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places." Matthew 24:6, 7.

The present is a time of overwhelming interest to all living. Rulers and statesmen, men who occupy positions of trust and authority, thinking men and women of all classes, have their attention fixed upon the events taking place about us. They are watching the relations that exist among the nations. They observe the intensity that is taking possession of every earthly element, and they recognize that something great and decisive is about to take place—that the world is on the verge of a stupendous crisis.

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The Bible, and the Bible only, gives a correct view of these things. Here are revealed the great final scenes in the history of our world, events that already are casting their shadows before, the sound of their approach causing the earth to tremble and men's hearts to fail them for fear.

"Behold, the Lord maketh the earth empty, and maketh it waste, and turneth it upside down, and scattereth abroad the inhabitants thereof; . . . because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore hath the curse devoured the earth, and they that dwell therein are desolate." Isaiah 24:1-6.

"Alas for the day! for the day of the Lord is at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come. . . . The seed is rotten under their clods, the garners are laid desolate, the barns are broken down; for the corn is withered. How do the beasts groan! the herds of cattle are perplexed, because they have no pasture; yea, the flocks of sheep are made desolate." "The vine is dried up, and the fig tree languisheth; the pomegranate tree, the palm tree also, and the apple tree, even all the trees of the field, are withered: because joy is withered away from the sons of men." Joel 1:15-18, 12.

"I am pained at my very heart; . . . I cannot hold my peace, because thou hast heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war. Destruction upon destruction is cried; for the whole land is spoiled." Jeremiah 4:19, 20.

"Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it." Jeremiah 30:7.

"Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge,
Even the Most High, thy habitation;

There shall no evil befall thee,
Neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling."
Psalm 91:9, 10.

"O daughter of Zion, . . . the Lord shall redeem thee from the hand of thine enemies. Now also many nations are gathered against thee, that say, Let her be defiled, and let our eye look upon Zion. But they know not the thoughts of the Lord, neither understand they His counsel." Micah 4:10-12. God will not fail His church in the hour of her greatest peril. He has promised deliverance. "I will bring again the captivity of Jacob's tents," He has declared, "and have mercy on his dwelling places." Jeremiah 30:18.

Then will the purpose of God be fulfilled; the principles of His kingdom will be honored by all beneath the sun.



chapter 44

This chapter is based on Daniel 6.

In the Lions' Den

WHEN Darius the Median took the throne formerly occupied by the Babylonian rulers, he at once proceeded to reorganize the government. He “set over the kingdom an hundred and twenty princes; . . . and over these three presidents; of whom Daniel was first: that the princes might give accounts unto them, and the king should have no damage. Then this Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king thought to set him over the whole realm.”

The honors bestowed upon Daniel excited the jealousy of the leading men of the kingdom, and they sought for occasion of complaint against him. But they could find none, “forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him.”

Daniel's blameless conduct excited still further the jealousy of his enemies. “We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel,” they were constrained to acknowledge, “ex-

After spending the night in the lions' den, Daniel greeted the king the next morning, praising God for protection.

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cept we find it against him concerning the law of his God.”

Thereupon the presidents and princes, counseling together, devised a scheme whereby they hoped to accomplish the prophet's destruction. They determined to ask the king to sign a decree which they should prepare, forbidding any person in the realm to ask anything of God or man, except of Darius the king, for the space of thirty days. A violation of this decree should be punished by casting the offender into a den of lions.

Accordingly, the princes prepared such a decree, and presented it to Darius for his signature. Appealing to his vanity, they persuaded him that the carrying out of this edict would add greatly to his honor and authority. Ignorant of the subtle purpose of the princes, the king did not discern their animosity as revealed in the decree, and, yielding to their flattery, he signed it.

The enemies of Daniel left the presence of Darius, rejoicing over the snare now securely laid for the servant of Jehovah. In the conspiracy thus formed, Satan had played an important part. The prophet was high in command in the kingdom, and evil angels feared that his influence would weaken their control over its rulers. It was these satanic agencies who had stirred the princes to envy and jealousy; it was they who had inspired the plan for Daniel's destruction; and the princes, yielding themselves as instruments of evil, carried it into effect.

The prophet's enemies counted on Daniel's firm adherence to principle for the success of their plan. And they were not mistaken in their estimate of his character. He quickly read their malignant purpose in framing the decree, but he did

not change his course in a single particular. Why should he cease to pray now, when he most needed to pray? Rather would he relinquish life itself, than his hope of help in God. With calmness he performed his duties as chief of the princes; and at the hour of prayer he went to his chamber, and with his windows open toward Jerusalem, in accordance with his usual custom, he offered his petition to the God of heaven. He did not try to conceal his act. Although he knew full well the consequences of his fidelity to God, his spirit faltered not. Before those who were plotting his ruin, he would not allow it even to appear that his connection with Heaven was severed. In all cases where the king had a right to command, Daniel would obey; but neither the king nor his decree could make him swerve from allegiance to the King of kings.

Thus the prophet boldly yet quietly and humbly declared that no earthly power has a right to interpose between the soul and God. Surrounded by idolaters, he was a faithful witness to this truth. His dauntless adherence to right was a bright light in the moral darkness of that heathen court. Daniel stands before the world today a worthy example of Christian fearlessness and fidelity.

For an entire day the princes watched Daniel. Three times they saw him go to his chamber, and three times they heard his voice lifted in earnest intercession to God. The next morning they laid their complaint before the king. Daniel, his most honored and faithful statesman, had set the royal decree at defiance. "Hast thou not signed a decree," they reminded him, "that every man that shall ask a petition of any god or man within thirty days, save of thee, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions?"

"The thing is true," the king answered, "according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not."

Exultantly they now informed Darius of the conduct of his most trusted adviser. "That Daniel, which is of the children of the captivity of Judah," they exclaimed, "regardeth not thee, O king, nor the decree that thou hast signed, but maketh his petition three times a day."

When the monarch heard these words, he saw at once the snare that had been set for his faithful servant. He saw that it was not zeal for kingly glory and honor, but jealousy against Daniel, that had led to the proposal for a royal decree. "Sore displeased with himself" for his part in the evil that had been wrought, he "labored till the going down of the sun" to deliver his friend. The princes, anticipating this effort on the part of the king, came to him with the words, "Know, O king, that the law of the Medes and Persians is, that no decree nor statute which the king establisheth may be changed." The decree, though rashly made, was unalterable and must be carried into effect.

"Then the king commanded, and they brought Daniel, and cast him into the den of lions. Now the king spake and said unto Daniel, Thy God whom thou servest continually, He will deliver thee." A stone was laid on the mouth of the den, and the king himself "sealed it with his own signet, and with the signet of his lords; that the purpose might not be changed concerning Daniel. Then the king went to his palace, and passed the night fasting: neither were instruments of music brought before him: and his sleep went from him."

God did not prevent Daniel's enemies from casting him into the lions' den; He permitted evil angels and wicked men



thus far to accomplish their purpose; but it was that He might make the deliverance of His servant more marked, and the defeat of the enemies of truth and righteousness more complete. "Surely the wrath of man shall praise Thee" (Psalm 76:10), the psalmist has testified. Through the courage of this one man who chose to follow right rather than policy, Satan was to be defeated, and the name of God was to be exalted and honored.

Early the next morning King Darius hastened to the den and "cried with a lamentable voice," "O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?"

The voice of the prophet replied: "O king, live forever. My God hath sent His angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before Him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt.

"Then was the king exceeding glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God.

"And the king commanded, and they brought those men which had accused Daniel, and they cast them into the den of lions, them, their children, and their wives; and the lions had the mastery of them, and brake all their bones in pieces or ever they came at the bottom of the den."

Once more a proclamation was issued by a heathen ruler, exalting the God of Daniel as the true God. "King Darius wrote unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you. I make a decree,

that in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for He is the living God, and steadfast forever, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and His dominion shall be even unto the end. He delivereth and rescueth, and He worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions."

The wicked opposition to God's servant was now completely broken. "Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian." And through association with him, these heathen monarchs were constrained to acknowledge his God as "the living God, and steadfast forever, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed."

From the story of Daniel's deliverance we may learn that in seasons of trial and gloom God's children should be just what they were when their prospects were bright with hope



and their surroundings all that they could desire. Daniel in the lions' den was the same Daniel who stood before the king as chief among the ministers of state and as a prophet of the Most High. A man whose heart is stayed upon God will be the same in the hour of his greatest trial as he is in prosperity, when the light and favor of God and of man beam upon him. Faith reaches to the unseen, and grasps eternal realities.

Heaven is very near those who suffer for righteousness' sake. Christ identifies His interests with the interests of His faithful people; He suffers in the person of His saints, and whoever touches His chosen ones touches Him. The power that is near to deliver from physical harm or distress is also near to save from the greater evil, making it possible for the servant of God to maintain his integrity under all circumstances, and to triumph through divine grace.

The experience of Daniel as a statesman in the kingdoms of Babylon and Medo-Persia reveals the truth that a businessman is not necessarily a designing, policy man, but that he may be a man instructed by God at every step. Daniel, the prime minister of the greatest of earthly kingdoms, was at the same time a prophet of God, receiving the light of heavenly inspiration. A man of like passions as ourselves, the pen of inspiration describes him as without fault. His business transactions, when subjected to the closest scrutiny of his enemies, were found to be without one flaw. He was an example of what every businessman may become when his heart is converted and consecrated, and when his motives are right in the sight of God.

Strict compliance with the requirements of Heaven brings temporal as well as spiritual blessings. Unwavering in his

allegiance to God, unyielding in his mastery of self, Daniel, by his noble dignity and unswerving integrity, while yet a young man, won the "favor and tender love" of the heathen officer in whose charge he had been placed. Daniel 1:9. The same characteristics marked his afterlife. He rose speedily to the position of prime minister of the kingdom of Babylon. Through the reign of successive monarchs, the downfall of the nation, and the establishment of another world empire, such were his wisdom and statesmanship, so perfect his tact, his courtesy, his genuine goodness of heart, his fidelity to principle, that even his enemies were forced to the confession that "they could find none occasion nor fault; forasmuch as he was faithful."

Honored by men with the responsibilities of state and with the secrets of kingdoms bearing universal sway, Daniel was honored by God as His ambassador, and was given many revelations of the mysteries of ages to come. His wonderful prophecies, as recorded by him in chapters 7 to 12 of the book bearing his name, were not fully understood even by the prophet himself; but before his life labors closed, he was given the blessed assurance that "at the end of the days"—in the closing period of this world's history—he would again be permitted to stand in his lot and place. It was not given him to understand all that God had revealed of the divine purpose. "Shut up the words, and seal the book," he was directed concerning his prophetic writings; these were to be sealed "even to the time of the end." "Go thy way, Daniel," the angel once more directed the faithful messenger of Jehovah; "for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end. . . . Go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt

rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days." Daniel 12:4, 9, 13.

As we near the close of this world's history, the prophecies recorded by Daniel demand our special attention, as they relate to the very time in which we are living. With them should be linked the teachings of the last book of the New Testament Scriptures. Satan has led many to believe that the prophetic portions of the writings of Daniel and of John the revelator cannot be understood. But the promise is plain that special blessing will accompany the study of these prophecies. "The wise shall understand" (verse 10), was spoken of the visions of Daniel that were to be unsealed in the latter days; and of the revelation that Christ gave to His servant John for the guidance of God's people all through the centuries, the promise is, "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein." Revelation 1:3.

From the rise and fall of nations as made plain in the books of Daniel and the Revelation, we need to learn how worthless is mere outward and worldly glory. Babylon, with all its power and magnificence, the like of which our world has never since beheld,—power and magnificence which to the people of that day seemed so stable and enduring,—how completely has it passed away! As "the flower of the grass," it has perished. James 1:10. So perished the Medo-Persian kingdom, and the kingdoms of Grecia and Rome. And so perishes all that has not God for its foundation. Only that which is bound up with His purpose, and expresses His character, can endure. His principles are the only steadfast things our world knows.

A careful study of the working out of God's purpose in the history of nations and in the revelation of things to come, will help us to estimate at their true value things seen and things unseen, and to learn what is the true aim of life. Thus, viewing the things of time in the light of eternity, we may, like Daniel and his fellows, live for that which is true and noble and enduring. And learning in this life the principles of the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour, that blessed kingdom which is to endure for ever and ever, we may be prepared at His coming to enter with Him into its possession.



chapter 45

The Return of the Exiles

THE advent of the army of Cyrus before the walls of Babylon was to the Jews a sign that their deliverance from captivity was drawing nigh. More than a century before the birth of Cyrus, Inspiration had mentioned him by name, and had caused a record to be made of the actual work he should do in taking the city of Babylon unawares, and in preparing the way for the release of the children of the captivity. Through Isaiah the word had been spoken:

“Thus saith the Lord to His anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; . . . to open before him the two-leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut; I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron: and I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the Lord, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel.” Isaiah 45:1-3.

Though beset with many difficulties,
the returning exiles proceeded with
the work of rebuilding the temple.

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In the unexpected entry of the army of the Persian conqueror into the heart of the Babylonian capital by way of the channel of the river whose waters had been turned aside, and through the inner gates that in careless security had been left open and unprotected, the Jews had abundant evidence of the literal fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy concerning the sudden overthrow of their oppressors. And this should have been to them an unmistakable sign that God was shaping the affairs of nations in their behalf; for inseparably linked with the prophecy outlining the manner of Babylon's capture and fall were the words:

"Cyrus, he is My shepherd, and shall perform all My pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid." "I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways: he shall build My city, and he shall let go My captives, not for price nor reward, saith the Lord of hosts." Isaiah 44:28; 45:13.

Nor were these the only prophecies upon which the exiles had opportunity to base their hope of speedy deliverance. The writings of Jeremiah were within their reach, and in these was plainly set forth the length of time that should elapse before the restoration of Israel from Babylon. "When seventy years are accomplished," the Lord had foretold through His messenger, "I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the Lord, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans, and will make it perpetual desolations." Jeremiah 25:12. Favor would be shown the remnant of Judah, in answer to fervent prayer. "I will be found of you, saith the Lord: and I will turn away your captivity, and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whither I

have driven you, saith the Lord; and I will bring you again into the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive." Jeremiah 29:14.

Often had Daniel and his companions gone over these and similar prophecies outlining God's purpose for His people. And now, as the rapid course of events betokened the mighty hand of God at work among the nations, Daniel gave special thought to the promises made to Israel. His faith in the prophetic word led him to enter into experiences foretold by the sacred writers. "After seventy years be accomplished at Babylon," the Lord had declared, "I will visit you, and perform My good word toward you, in causing you to return. . . . I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Then shall ye call upon Me, and ye shall go and pray unto Me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek Me, and find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart." Verses 10-13.

Shortly before the fall of Babylon, when Daniel was meditating on these prophecies and seeking God for an understanding of the times, a series of visions was given him concerning the rise and fall of kingdoms. With the first vision, as recorded in the seventh chapter of the book of Daniel, an interpretation was given; yet not all was made clear to the prophet. "My cogitations much troubled me," he wrote of his experience at the time, "and my countenance changed in me: but I kept the matter in my heart." Daniel 7:28.

Through another vision further light was thrown upon the events of the future; and it was at the close of this vision that Daniel heard "one saint speaking, and another saint said

unto that certain saint which spake, How long shall be the vision?" Daniel 8:13. The answer that was given, "Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed" (verse 14), filled him with perplexity. Earnestly he sought for the meaning of the vision. He could not understand the relation sustained by the seventy years' captivity, as foretold through Jeremiah, to the twenty-three hundred years that in vision he heard the heavenly visitant declare should elapse before the cleansing of God's sanctuary. The angel Gabriel gave him a partial interpretation; yet when the prophet heard the words, "The vision . . . shall be for many days," he fainted away. "I Daniel fainted," he records of his experience, "and was sick certain days; afterward I rose up, and did the king's business; and I was astonished at the vision, but none understood it." Verses 26, 27.

Still burdened in behalf of Israel, Daniel studied anew the prophecies of Jeremiah. They were very plain—so plain that he understood by these testimonies recorded in books "the number of the years, whereof the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem." Daniel 9:2.

With faith founded on the sure word of prophecy, Daniel pleaded with the Lord for the speedy fulfillment of these promises. He pleaded for the honor of God to be preserved. In his petition he identified himself fully with those who had fallen short of the divine purpose, confessing their sins as his own.

"I set my face unto the Lord God," the prophet declared, "to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes: and I prayed unto the Lord my God, and

made my confession." Verses 3, 4. Though Daniel had long been in the service of God, and had been spoken of by heaven as "greatly beloved," yet he now appeared before God as a sinner, urging the great need of the people he loved. His prayer was eloquent in its simplicity, and intensely earnest. Hear him pleading:

"O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love Him, and to them that keep His commandments; we have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from Thy precepts and from Thy judgments; neither have we hearkened unto Thy servants the prophets, which spake in Thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land.

"O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto Thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day; to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and unto all Israel, that are near, and that are far off, through all the countries whither Thou hast driven them, because of their trespass that they have trespassed against Thee. . . .

"To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against Him." "O Lord, according to all Thy righteousness, I beseech Thee, let Thine anger and Thy fury be turned away from Thy city Jerusalem, Thy holy mountain: because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Thy people are become a reproach to all that are about us.

"Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of Thy servant, and his supplications, and cause Thy face to shine upon Thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake. O my

God, incline Thine ear, and hear; open Thine eyes, and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by Thy name: for we do not present our supplications before Thee for our righteousnesses, but for Thy great mercies.

“O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for Thine own sake, O my God: for Thy city and Thy people are called by Thy name.” Verses 4-9, 16-19.

Heaven was bending low to hear the earnest supplication of the prophet. Even before he had finished his plea for pardon and restoration, the mighty Gabriel again appeared to him, and called his attention to the vision he had seen prior to the fall of Babylon and the death of Belshazzar. And then the angel outlined before him in detail the period of the seventy weeks, which was to begin at the time of “the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem.” Verse 25.

Daniel’s prayer had been offered “in the first year of Darius” (verse 1), the Median monarch whose general, Cyrus, had wrested from Babylonia the scepter of universal rule. The reign of Darius was honored of God. To him was sent the angel Gabriel, “to confirm and to strengthen him.” Daniel 11:1. Upon his death, within about two years of the fall of Babylon, Cyrus succeeded to the throne, and the beginning of his reign marked the completion of the seventy years since the first company of Hebrews had been taken by Nebuchadnezzar from their Judean home to Babylon.

The deliverance of Daniel from the den of lions had been used of God to create a favorable impression upon the mind of Cyrus the Great. The sterling qualities of the man of God as a statesman of farseeing ability led the Persian ruler to

show him marked respect and to honor his judgment. And now, just at the time God had said He would cause His temple at Jerusalem to be rebuilt, He moved upon Cyrus as His agent to discern the prophecies concerning himself, with which Daniel was so familiar, and to grant the Jewish people their liberty.

As the king saw the words foretelling, more than a hundred years before his birth, the manner in which Babylon should be taken; as he read the message addressed to him by the Ruler of the universe, "I girded thee, though thou hast not known Me: that they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside Me;" as he saw before his eyes the declaration of the eternal God, "For Jacob My servant's sake, and Israel Mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known Me;" as he traced the inspired record, "I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways: he shall build My city, and he shall let go My captives, not for price nor reward," his heart was profoundly moved, and he determined to fulfill his divinely appointed mission. Isaiah 45:5, 6, 4, 13. He would let the Judean captives go free; he would help them restore the temple of Jehovah.

In a written proclamation published "throughout all his kingdom," Cyrus made known his desire to provide for the return of the Hebrews and for the rebuilding of their temple. "The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth," the king gratefully acknowledged in this public proclamation; "and He hath charged me to build Him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among

you of all His people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, . . . and build the house of the Lord God of Israel, (He is the God,) which is in Jerusalem. And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering.” Ezra 1:1-4.

“Let the house be builded,” he further directed regarding the temple structure, “the place where they offered sacrifices, and let the foundations thereof be strongly laid; the height thereof threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof threescore cubits; with three rows of great stones, and a row of new timber: and let the expenses be given out of the king’s house: and also let the golden and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took forth out of the temple which is at Jerusalem, and brought unto Babylon, be restored, and brought again unto the temple which is at Jerusalem.” Ezra 6:3-5.

Tidings of this decree reached the farthestmost provinces of the king’s realm, and everywhere among the children of the dispersion there was great rejoicing. Many, like Daniel, had been studying the prophecies, and had been seeking God for His promised intervention in behalf of Zion. And now their prayers were being answered; and with heartfelt joy they could unite in singing:

“When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion,
We were like them that dream.
Then was our mouth filled with laughter,
And our tongue with singing:
Then said they among the heathen,



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The Lord hath done great things for them.
The Lord hath done great things for us;
Whereof we are glad."

Psalm 126:1-3.

"The chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all them whose spirit God had raised"—these were the goodly remnant, about fifty thousand strong, from among the Jews in the lands of exile, who determined to take advantage of the wonderful opportunity offered them "to go up to build the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem." Their friends did not permit them to go empty-handed. "All they that were about them strengthened their hands with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, and with beasts, and with precious things." And to these and many other voluntary offerings were added "the vessels of the house of the Lord, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem; . . . even those did Cyrus king of Persia bring forth by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, . . . five thousand and four hundred" in number, for use in the temple that was to be rebuilt. Ezra 1:5-11.

Upon Zerubbabel (known also as Sheshbazzar), a descendant of King David, Cyrus placed the responsibility of acting as governor of the company returning to Judea; and with him was associated Joshua the high priest. The long journey across the desert wastes was accomplished in safety, and the happy company, grateful to God for His many mercies, at once undertook the work of re-establishing that which had been broken down and destroyed. "The chief of the fathers" led out in offering of their substance to help defray the expense of rebuilding the temple; and the people, following their

example, gave freely of their meager store. See Ezra 2:64-70.

As speedily as possible, an altar was erected on the site of the ancient altar in the temple court. To the exercises connected with the dedication of this altar, the people had "gathered themselves together as one man;" and there they united in re-establishing the sacred services that had been interrupted at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. Before separating to dwell in the homes they were endeavoring to restore, "they kept also the Feast of Tabernacles." Ezra 3:1-6.

The setting up of the altar of daily burnt offerings greatly cheered the faithful remnant. Heartily they entered into the preparations necessary for the rebuilding of the temple, gathering courage as these preparations advanced from month to month. They had for many years been deprived of the visible tokens of God's presence. And now, surrounded as they were by many sad reminders of the apostasy of their fathers, they longed for some abiding token of divine forgiveness and favor. Above the regaining of personal property and ancient privileges, they valued the approval of God. Wonderfully had He wrought in their behalf, and they felt the assurance of His presence with them; yet they desired greater blessings still. With joyous anticipation they looked forward to the time when, with temple rebuilt, they might behold the shining forth of His glory from within.

The workmen engaged in the preparation of the building material, found among the ruins some of the immense stones brought to the temple site in the days of Solomon. These were made ready for use, and much new material was provided; and soon the work was advanced to the point where the foun-

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dition stone must be laid. This was done in the presence of many thousands who had assembled to witness the progress of the work and to give expression to their joy in having a part in it. While the cornerstone was being set in position, the people, accompanied by the trumpets of the priests and the cymbals of the sons of Asaph, “sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the Lord; because He is good, for His mercy endureth forever toward Israel.” Verse 11.

The house that was about to be rebuilt had been the subject of many prophecies concerning the favor that God desired to show Zion, and all who were present at the laying of the cornerstone should have entered heartily into the spirit of the occasion. Yet mingled with the music and the shouts of praise that were heard on that glad day, was a discordant note. “Many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice.” Verse 12.

It was natural that sadness should fill the hearts of these aged men, as they thought of the results of long-continued impenitence. Had they and their generation obeyed God, and carried out His purpose for Israel, the temple built by Solomon would not have been destroyed and the captivity would not have been necessary. But because of ingratitude and disloyalty they had been scattered among the heathen.

Conditions were now changed. In tender mercy the Lord had again visited His people and allowed them to return to their own land. Sadness because of the mistakes of the past should have given way to feelings of great joy. God had moved upon the heart of Cyrus to aid them in rebuilding the temple,

and this should have called forth expressions of profound gratitude. But some failed of discerning God's opening providences. Instead of rejoicing, they cherished thoughts of discontent and discouragement. They had seen the glory of Solomon's temple, and they lamented because of the inferiority of the building now to be erected.

The murmuring and complaining, and the unfavorable comparisons made, had a depressing influence on the minds of many and weakened the hands of the builders. The workmen were led to question whether they should proceed with the erection of a building that at the beginning was so freely criticized and was the cause of so much lamentation.

There were many in the congregation, however, whose larger faith and broader vision did not lead them to view this lesser glory with such dissatisfaction. "Many shouted aloud for joy: so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off." Verses 12, 13.

Could those who failed to rejoice at the laying of the foundation stone of the temple have foreseen the results of their lack of faith on that day, they would have been appalled. Little did they realize the weight of their words of disapproval and disappointment; little did they know how much their expressed dissatisfaction would delay the completion of the Lord's house.

The magnificence of the first temple, and the imposing rites of its religious services, had been a source of pride to Israel before their captivity; but their worship had oftentimes been lacking in those qualities which God regards as most

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essential. The glory of the first temple, the splendor of its service, could not recommend them to God; for that which is alone of value in His sight, they did not offer. They did not bring Him the sacrifice of a humble and contrite spirit.

It is when the vital principles of the kingdom of God are lost sight of, that ceremonies become multitudinous and extravagant. It is when the character building is neglected, when the adornment of the soul is lacking, when the simplicity of godliness is despised, that pride and love of display demand magnificent church edifices, splendid adornings, and imposing ceremonials. But in all this God is not honored. He values His church, not for its external advantages, but for the sincere piety which distinguishes it from the world. He estimates it according to the growth of its members in the knowledge of Christ, according to their progress in spiritual experience. He looks for the principles of love and goodness. Not all the beauty of art can bear comparison with the beauty of temper and character to be revealed in those who are Christ's representatives.

A congregation may be the poorest in the land. It may be without the attractions of any outward show; but if the members possess the principles of the character of Christ, angels will unite with them in their worship. The praise and thanksgiving from grateful hearts will ascend to God as a sweet oblation.

“Give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good:

For His mercy endureth forever.

Let the redeemed of the Lord say so,

Whom He hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy.”

“Sing unto Him, sing psalms unto Him:

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Talk ye of all His wondrous works.
Glory ye in His holy name:
Let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord.”

“For He satisfieth the longing soul,
And filleth the hungry soul with goodness.”

Psalms 107:1, 2; 105:2, 3; 107:9.



chapter 46

“The Prophets of God Helping Them”

CLOSE by the Israelites who had set themselves to the task of rebuilding the temple, dwelt the Samaritans, a mixed race that had sprung up through the intermarriage of heathen colonists from the provinces of Assyria with the remnant of the ten tribes which had been left in Samaria and Galilee. In later years the Samaritans claimed to worship the true God, but in heart and practice they were idolaters. It is true, they held that their idols were but to remind them of the living God, the Ruler of the universe; nevertheless the people were prone to reverence graven images.

During the period of the restoration, these Samaritans came to be known as “the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin.” Hearing that “the children of the captivity builded the temple unto the Lord God of Israel,” “they came to Zerubbabel, and to the chief of the fathers,” and expressed a desire to unite with them in its erection. “Let us build with you,” they proposed; “for we seek your God, as ye do;

Heathen colonists living in areas surrounding Jerusalem challenged the right of the Jews to rebuild their city.

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JOHN STEEL, ARTIST

and we do sacrifice unto Him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assur, which brought us up hither." But the privilege they asked was refused them. "Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God," the leaders of the Israelites declared; "but we ourselves together will build unto the Lord God of Israel, as King Cyrus the king of Persia hath commanded us." Ezra 4:1-3.

Only a remnant had chosen to return from Babylon; and now, as they undertake a work seemingly beyond their strength, their nearest neighbors come with an offer of help. The Samaritans refer to their worship of the true God, and express a desire to share the privileges and blessings connected with the temple service. "We seek your God, as ye do," they declare. "Let us build with you." But had the Jewish leaders accepted this offer of assistance, they would have opened a door for the entrance of idolatry. They discerned the insincerity of the Samaritans. They realized that help gained through an alliance with these men would be as nothing in comparison with the blessing they might expect to receive by following the plain commands of Jehovah.

Regarding the relation that Israel should sustain to surrounding peoples, the Lord had declared through Moses: "Thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor show mercy unto them: neither shalt thou make marriages with them; . . . for they will turn away thy son from following Me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the Lord be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly." "Thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God, and the Lord hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto Himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth." Deuteronomy 7:2-4; 14:2.

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The result that would follow an entrance into covenant relation with surrounding nations was plainly foretold. “The Lord shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other,” Moses had declared; “and there thou shalt serve other gods, which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, even wood and stone. And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest: but the Lord shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind: and thy life shall hang in doubt before thee; and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life: in the morning thou shalt say, Would God it were even! and at even thou shalt say, Would God it were morning! for the fear of thine heart wherewith thou shalt fear, and for the sight of thine eyes which thou shalt see.” Deuteronomy 28:64-67. “But if from thence thou shalt seek the Lord thy God,” the promise had been, “thou shalt find Him, if thou seek Him with all thy heart and with all thy soul.” Deuteronomy 4:29.

Zerubbabel and his associates were familiar with these and many like scriptures; and in the recent captivity they had evidence after evidence of their fulfillment. And now, having repented of the evils that had brought upon them and their fathers the judgments foretold so plainly through Moses; having turned with all the heart to God, and renewed their covenant relationship with Him, they had been permitted to return to Judea, that they might restore that which had been destroyed. Should they, at the very beginning of their undertaking, enter into a covenant with idolaters?

“Thou shalt make no covenant with them,” God had said;

and those who had recently rededicated themselves to the Lord at the altar set up before the ruins of His temple, realized that the line of demarcation between His people and the world is ever to be kept unmistakably distinct. They refused to enter into alliance with those who, though familiar with the requirements of God's law, would not yield to its claims.

The principles set forth in Deuteronomy for the instruction of Israel are to be followed by God's people to the end of time. True prosperity is dependent on the continuance of our covenant relationship with God. Never can we afford to compromise principle by entering into alliance with those who do not fear Him.

There is constant danger that professing Christians will come to think that in order to have influence with worldlings, they must to a certain extent conform to the world. But though such a course may appear to afford great advantages, it always ends in spiritual loss. Against every subtle influence that seeks entrance by means of flattering inducements from the enemies of truth, God's people must strictly guard. They are pilgrims and strangers in this world, traveling a path beset with danger. To the ingenious subterfuges and alluring inducements held out to tempt from allegiance, they must give no heed.

It is not the open and avowed enemies of the cause of God that are most to be feared. Those who, like the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin, come with smooth words and fair speeches, apparently seeking for friendly alliance with God's children, have greater power to deceive. Against such every soul should be on the alert, lest some carefully concealed and masterly snare take him unaware. And especially today, while

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earth's history is closing, the Lord requires of His children a vigilance that knows no relaxation. But though the conflict is a ceaseless one, none are left to struggle alone. Angels help and protect those who walk humbly before God. Never will our Lord betray one who trusts in Him. As His children draw near to Him for protection from evil, in pity and love He lifts up for them a standard against the enemy. Touch them not, He says; for they are Mine. I have graven them upon the palms of My hands.

Untiring in their opposition, the Samaritans “weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building, and hired counselors against them, to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius.” Ezra 4:4, 5. By false reports they aroused suspicion in minds easily led to suspect. But for many years the powers of evil were held in check, and the people in Judea had liberty to continue their work.



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While Satan was striving to influence the highest powers in the kingdom of Medo-Persia to show disfavor to God's people, angels worked in behalf of the exiles. The controversy was one in which all heaven was interested. Through the prophet Daniel we are given a glimpse of this mighty struggle between the forces of good and the forces of evil. For three weeks Gabriel wrestled with the powers of darkness, seeking to counteract the influences at work on the mind of Cyrus; and before the contest closed, Christ Himself came to Gabriel's aid. "The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days," Gabriel declares; "but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I remained there with the kings of Persia." Daniel 10:13. All that heaven could do in behalf of the people of God was done. The victory was finally gained; the forces of the enemy were held in check all the days of Cyrus, and all the days of his son Cambyes, who reigned about seven and a half years.

This was a time of wonderful opportunity for the Jews. The highest agencies of heaven were working on the hearts of kings, and it was for the people of God to labor with the utmost activity to carry out the decree of Cyrus. They should have spared no effort to restore the temple and its services, and to re-establish themselves in their Judean homes. But in the day of God's power many proved unwilling. The opposition of their enemies was strong and determined, and gradually the builders lost heart. Some could not forget the scene at the laying of the cornerstone, when many had given expression to their lack of confidence in the enterprise. And as the Samaritans grew more bold, many of the Jews questioned whether, after all, the time had come to rebuild. The feeling



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soon became widespread. Many of the workmen, discouraged and disheartened, returned to their homes to take up the ordinary pursuits of life.

During the reign of Cambyses the work on the temple progressed slowly. And during the reign of the false Smerdis (called Artaxerxes in Ezra 4:7) the Samaritans induced the unscrupulous impostor to issue a decree forbidding the Jews to rebuild their temple and city.

For over a year the temple was neglected and well-nigh forsaken. The people dwelt in their homes and strove to attain temporal prosperity, but their situation was deplorable. Work as they might they did not prosper. The very elements of nature seemed to conspire against them. Because they had let the temple lie waste, the Lord sent upon their substance a wasting drought. God had bestowed upon them the fruits of field and garden, the corn and the wine and the oil, as a token of His favor; but because they had used these bountiful gifts so selfishly, the blessings were removed.

Such were the conditions existing during the early part of the reign of Darius Hystaspes. Spiritually as well as temporally, the Israelites were in a pitiable state. So long had they murmured and doubted; so long had they chosen to make personal interests first, while viewing with apathy the Lord's temple in ruins, that many had lost sight of God's purpose in restoring them to Judea; and these were saying, "The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built." Haggai 1:2.

But even this dark hour was not without hope for those whose trust was in God. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah were raised up to meet the crisis. In stirring testimonies

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these appointed messengers revealed to the people the cause of their troubles. The lack of temporal prosperity was the result of a neglect to put God's interests first, the prophets declared. Had the Israelites honored God, had they shown Him due respect and courtesy, by making the building of His house their first work, they would have invited His presence and blessing.

To those who had become discouraged, Haggai addressed the searching inquiry, "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste? Now therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways." Why have you done so little? Why do you feel concern for your own buildings and unconcern for the Lord's building? Where is the zeal you once felt for the restoration of the Lord's house? What have you gained by serving self? The desire to escape poverty has led you to neglect the temple, but this neglect has brought upon you that which you feared. "Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes." Verses 4-6.

And then, in words that they could not fail to understand, the Lord revealed the cause that had brought them to want: "Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the Lord of hosts. Because of Mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house. Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit. And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the

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oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labor of the hands." Verses 9-11.

"Consider your ways," the Lord urged. "Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified." Verses 7, 8.

The message of counsel and reproof given through Haggai was taken to heart by the leaders and people of Israel. They felt that God was in earnest with them. They dared not disregard the repeated instruction sent them—that their prosperity, both temporal and spiritual, was dependent on faithful obedience to God's commands. Aroused by the warnings of the prophet, Zerubbabel and Joshua, "with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet." Verse 12.

As soon as Israel decided to obey, the words of reproof were followed by a message of encouragement. "Then spake Haggai . . . unto the people, saying, I am with you, saith the Lord. And the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel" and of Joshua, and "of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the Lord of hosts, their God." Verses 13, 14.

In less than a month after the work on the temple was resumed, the builders received another comforting message. "Be strong, O Zerubbabel," the Lord Himself urged through His prophet; "be strong, O Joshua; . . . and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the Lord, and work: for I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts." Haggai 2:4.

To Israel encamped before Mount Sinai the Lord had declared: "I will dwell among the children of Israel, and

will be their God. And they shall know that I am the Lord their God, that brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them: I am the Lord their God.” Exodus 29:45, 46. And now, notwithstanding the fact that they had repeatedly “rebelled, and vexed His Holy Spirit” (Isaiah 63:10), God once more, through the messages of His prophet, was stretching out His hand to save. As a recognition of their co-operation with His purpose, He was renewing His covenant that His Spirit should remain among them; and He bade them, “Fear not.”

To His children today the Lord declares, “Be strong, . . . and work: for I am with you.” The Christian always has a strong helper in the Lord. The way of the Lord’s helping we may not know; but this we do know: He will never fail those who put their trust in Him. Could Christians realize how many times the Lord has ordered their way, that the purposes of the enemy concerning them might not be accomplished, they would not stumble along complainingly. Their faith would be stayed on God, and no trial would have power to move them. They would acknowledge Him as their wisdom and efficiency, and He would bring to pass that which He desires to work out through them.

The earnest pleadings and the encouragements given through Haggai were emphasized and added to by Zechariah, whom God raised up to stand by his side in urging Israel to carry out the command to arise and build. Zechariah’s first message was an assurance that God’s word never fails and a promise of blessing to those who would hearken to the sure word of prophecy.

With fields lying waste, with their scant store of pro-

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visions rapidly failing, and surrounded as they were by unfriendly peoples, the Israelites nevertheless moved forward by faith in response to the call of God's messengers, and labored diligently to restore the ruined temple. It was a work requiring firm reliance upon God. As the people endeavored to do their part, and sought for a renewal of God's grace in heart and life, message after message was given them through Haggai and Zechariah, with assurances that their faith would be richly rewarded and that the word of God concerning the future glory of the temple whose walls they were rearing would not fail. In this very building would appear, in the fullness of time, the Desire of all nations as the Teacher and Saviour of mankind.

Thus the builders were not left to struggle alone; "with



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them were the prophets of God helping them;” and the Lord of hosts Himself had declared, “Be strong, . . . and work: for I am with you.” Ezra 5:2; Haggai 2:4.

With heartfelt repentance and a willingness to advance by faith, came the promise of temporal prosperity. “From this day,” the Lord declared, “will I bless you.” Verse 19.

To Zerubbabel their leader—he who, through all the years since their return from Babylon, had been so sorely tried—was given a most precious message. The day was coming, the Lord declared, when all the enemies of His chosen people would be cast down. “In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, will I take thee, O Zerubbabel, My servant, . . . and will make thee as a signet: for I have chosen thee.” Verse 23. Now the governor of Israel could see the meaning of the providence that had led him through discouragement and perplexity; he could discern God’s purpose in it all.

This personal word to Zerubbabel has been left on record for the encouragement of God’s children in every age. God has a purpose in sending trial to His children. He never leads them otherwise than they would choose to be led if they could see the end from the beginning, and discern the glory of the purpose that they are fulfilling. All that He brings upon them in test and trial comes that they may be strong to do and to suffer for Him.

The messages delivered by Haggai and Zechariah roused the people to put forth every possible effort for the rebuilding of the temple; but, as they worked, they were sadly harrassed by the Samaritans and others who devised many hindrances. On one occasion the provincial officers of the Medo-Persian realm visited Jerusalem and requested the name of the one

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who had authorized the restoration of the building. If at that time the Jews had not been trusting in the Lord for guidance, this inquiry might have resulted disastrously to them. "But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, that they could not cause them to cease, till the matter came to Darius." Ezra 5:5. The officers were answered so wisely that they decided to write a letter to Darius Hystaspes, then the ruler of Medo-Persia, directing his attention to the original decree made by Cyrus, which commanded that the house of God at Jerusalem be rebuilt, and that the expenses for the same be paid from the king's treasury.

Darius searched for this decree, and found it; whereupon he directed those who had made the inquiry to allow the rebuilding of the temple to proceed. "Let the work of this house of God alone," he commanded; "let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God in his place.

"Moreover," Darius continued, "*I make a decree* what ye shall do to the elders of these Jews for the building of this house of God: that of the king's goods, even of the tribute beyond the river, forthwith expenses be given unto these men, that they be not hindered. And that which they have need of, both young bullocks, and rams, and lambs, for the burnt offerings of the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the appointment of the priests which are at Jerusalem, let it be given them day by day without fail: that they may offer sacrifices of sweet savors unto the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king, and of his sons." Ezra 6:7-10.

The king further decreed that severe penalties be meted

out to those who should in any wise alter the decree; and he closed with the remarkable statement: “The God that hath caused His name to dwell there destroy all kings and people, that shall put to their hand to alter and to destroy this house of God which is at Jerusalem. I Darius have made a decree; let it be done with speed.” Verse 12. Thus the Lord prepared the way for the completion of the temple.

For months before this decree was made, the Israelites had kept on working by faith, the prophets of God still helping them by means of timely messages, through which the divine purpose for Israel was kept before the workers. Two months after Haggai’s last recorded message was delivered, Zechariah had a series of visions regarding the work of God in the earth. These messages, given in the form of parables and symbols, came at a time of great uncertainty and anxiety, and were of peculiar significance to the men who were advancing in the name of the God of Israel. It seemed to the leaders as if the permission granted the Jews to rebuild was about to be withdrawn; the future appeared very dark. God saw that His people were in need of being sustained and cheered by a revelation of His infinite compassion and love.

In vision Zechariah heard the angel of the Lord inquiring, “O Lord of hosts, how long wilt Thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which Thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years? And the Lord answered the angel that talked with me,” Zechariah declared, “with good words and comfortable words.

“So the angel that communed with me said unto me, Cry thou, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts; I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy. And I am very

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sore displeased with the heathen that are at ease: for I was but a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction. Therefore thus saith the Lord; I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies: My house shall be built in it, . . . and a line shall be stretched forth upon Jerusalem." Zechariah 1:12-16.

The prophet was now directed to predict, "Thus saith the Lord of hosts; My cities through prosperity shall yet be spread abroad; and the Lord shall yet comfort Zion, and shall yet choose Jerusalem." Verse 17.

Zechariah then saw the powers that had "scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem," symbolized by four horns. Immediately afterward he saw four carpenters, representing the agencies used by the Lord in restoring His people and the house of His worship. See verses 18-21.

"I lifted up mine eyes again," Zechariah said, "and looked, and behold a man with a measuring line in his hand. Then said I, Whither goest thou? And he said unto me, To measure Jerusalem, to see what is the breadth thereof, and what is the length thereof. And, behold, the angel that talked with me went forth, and another angel went out to meet him, and said unto him, Run, speak to this young man, saying, Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein: for I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her." Zechariah 2:1-5.

God had commanded that Jerusalem be rebuilt; the vision of the measuring of the city was an assurance that He would give comfort and strength to His afflicted ones, and fulfill to them the promises of His everlasting covenant. His protect-

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ing care, He declared, would be like “a wall of fire round about;” and through them His glory would be revealed to all the sons of men. That which He was accomplishing for His people was to be known in all the earth. “Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion: for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee.” Isaiah 12:6.

chapter 47

Joshua and the Angel

THE steady advancement made by the builders of the temple greatly discomfited and alarmed the hosts of evil. Satan determined to put forth still further effort to weaken and discourage God's people by holding before them their imperfections of character. If those who had long suffered because of transgression could again be induced to disregard God's commandments, they would be brought once more under the bondage of sin.

Because Israel had been chosen to preserve the knowledge of God in the earth, they had ever been the special objects of Satan's enmity; he was determined to cause their destruction. While they were obedient, he could do them no harm; therefore he had bent all his power and cunning to entice them into sin. Ensnared by his temptations, they had transgressed the law of God and had been left to become the prey of their enemies.

Yet though they were carried as captives to Babylon, God did not forsake them. He sent His prophets to them with reproofs and warnings, and aroused them to see their guilt.

When they humbled themselves before God and returned to Him with true repentance, He sent them messages of encouragement, declaring that He would deliver them from captivity, restore them to His favor, and once more establish them in their own land. And now that this work of restoration had begun, and a remnant of Israel had already returned to Judea, Satan was determined to frustrate the carrying out of the divine purpose, and to this end he was seeking to move upon the heathen nations to destroy them utterly.

But in this crisis the Lord strengthened His people "with good words and comfortable words." Zechariah 1:13. Through an impressive illustration of the work of Satan and the work of Christ, He showed the power of their Mediator to vanquish the accuser of His people.

In vision the prophet beholds "Joshua the high priest," "clothed with filthy garments" (Zechariah 3:1, 3), standing before the Angel of the Lord, entreating God's mercy in behalf of his afflicted people. As he pleads for the fulfillment of God's promises, Satan stands up boldly to resist him. He points to the transgressions of Israel as a reason why they should not be restored to the favor of God. He claims them as his prey, and demands that they be given into his hands.

The high priest cannot defend himself or his people from Satan's accusations. He does not claim that Israel is free from fault. In filthy garments, symbolizing the sins of the people, which he bears as their representative, he stands before the Angel, confessing their guilt, yet pointing to their repentance and humiliation, and relying upon the mercy of a sin-pardoning Redeemer. In faith he claims the promises of God.

Then the Angel, who is Christ Himself, the Saviour of

sinner, puts to silence the accuser of His people, declaring, "The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" Verse 2. Long had Israel remained in the furnace of affliction. Because of their sins they had been well-nigh consumed in the flame kindled by Satan and his agents for their destruction, but God had now set His hand to bring them forth.

As the intercession of Joshua is accepted, the command is given, "Take away the filthy garments from him;" and to Joshua the Angel says, "Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment." "So they set a fair miter upon his head, and clothed him with garments." Verses 4, 5. His own sins and those of his people were pardoned. Israel was clothed with "change of raiment"—the righteousness of Christ imputed to them. The miter placed upon Joshua's head was such as was worn by the priests, and bore the inscription, "Holiness to the Lord" (Exodus 28:36), signifying that notwithstanding his former transgressions, he was now qualified to minister before God in His sanctuary.

The Angel now declared to Joshua: "Thus saith the Lord of hosts; If thou wilt walk in My ways, and if thou wilt keep My charge, then thou shalt also judge My house, and shalt also keep My courts, and I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by." Zechariah 3:7. If obedient, he should be honored as the judge, or ruler, over the temple and all its services; he should walk among attending angels, even in this life; and at last he should join the glorified throng around the throne of God.

JOSHUA AND THE ANGEL

"Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, thou, and thy fellows that sit before thee: for they are men wondered at: for, behold, I will bring forth My Servant the Branch." Verse 8. In the Branch, the Deliverer to come, lay the hope of Israel. It was by faith in the coming Saviour that Joshua and his people had received pardon. Through faith in Christ they had been restored to God's favor. By virtue of His merits, if they walked in His ways and kept His statutes, they would be "men wondered at," honored as the chosen of Heaven among the nations of the earth.

As Satan accused Joshua and his people, so in all ages he accuses those who seek the mercy and favor of God. He is "the accuser of our brethren, . . . which accused them before our God day and night." Revelation 12:10. Over every soul that is rescued from the power of evil, and whose name is registered in the Lamb's book of life, the controversy is repeated. Never is one received into the family of God without exciting the determined resistance of the enemy. But He who was the hope of Israel then, their defense, their justification and redemption, is the hope of the church today.



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Satan's accusations against those who seek the Lord are not prompted by displeasure at their sins. He exults in their defective characters; for he knows that only through their transgression of God's law can he obtain power over them. His accusations arise solely from his enmity to Christ. Through the plan of salvation, Jesus is breaking Satan's hold upon the human family and rescuing souls from his power. All the hatred and malignity of the archrebel is stirred as he beholds the evidences of Christ's supremacy; and with fiendish power and cunning he works to wrest from Him the children of men who have accepted salvation. He leads men into skepticism, causing them to lose confidence in God and to separate from His love; he tempts them to break the law and then claims them as his captives, contesting Christ's right to take them from him.

Satan knows that those who ask God for pardon and grace will obtain it; therefore he presents their sins before them to discourage them. Against those who are trying to obey God, he is constantly seeking occasion for complaint. Even their best and most acceptable service he seeks to make appear corrupt. By countless devices, the most subtle and the most cruel, he endeavors to secure their condemnation.

In his own strength, man cannot meet the charges of the enemy. In sin-stained garments, confessing his guilt, he stands before God. But Jesus, our Advocate, presents an effectual plea in behalf of all who by repentance and faith have committed the keeping of their souls to Him. He pleads their cause, and by the mighty arguments of Calvary, vanquishes their accuser. His perfect obedience to God's law has given Him all power in heaven and in earth, and He claims from

His Father mercy and reconciliation for guilty man. To the accuser of His people He declares: "The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan. These are the purchase of My blood, brands plucked from the burning." And to those who rely on Him in faith, He gives the assurance, "Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment." Zechariah 3:4.

All who have put on the robe of Christ's righteousness will stand before Him as chosen and faithful and true. Satan has no power to pluck them out of the hand of the Saviour. Not one soul who in penitence and faith has claimed His protection will Christ permit to pass under the enemy's power. His word is pledged: "Let him take hold of My strength, that he may make peace with Me; and he shall make peace with Me." Isaiah 27:5. The promise given to Joshua is given to all: "If thou wilt keep My charge, . . . I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by." Zechariah 3:7. Angels of God will walk on either side of them, even in this world, and they will stand at last among the angels that surround the throne of God.

Zechariah's vision of Joshua and the Angel applies with peculiar force to the experience of God's people in the closing scenes of the great day of atonement. The remnant church will then be brought into great trial and distress. Those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus will feel the ire of the dragon and his hosts. Satan numbers the world as his subjects; he has gained control even of many professing Christians. But here is a little company who are resisting his supremacy. If he could blot them from the earth, his triumph would be complete. As he influenced the heathen

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nations to destroy Israel, so in the near future he will stir up the wicked powers of earth to destroy the people of God. Men will be required to render obedience to human edicts in violation of the divine law.

Those who are true to God will be menaced, denounced, proscribed. They will be “betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks, and friends,” even unto death. Luke 21:16. Their only hope is in the mercy of God; their only defense will be prayer. As Joshua pleaded before the Angel, so the remnant church, with brokenness of heart and unfaltering faith, will plead for pardon and deliverance through Jesus, their Advocate. They are fully conscious of the sinfulness of their lives, they see their weakness and unworthiness; and they are ready to despair.

The tempter stands by to accuse them, as he stood by to resist Joshua. He points to their filthy garments, their defective characters. He presents their weakness and folly, their sins of ingratitude, their unlikeness to Christ, which has dishonored their Redeemer. He endeavors to affright them with the thought that their case is hopeless, that the stain of their defilement will never be washed away. He hopes so to destroy their faith that they will yield to his temptations, and turn from their allegiance to God.

Satan has an accurate knowledge of the sins that he has tempted God's people to commit, and he urges his accusations against them, declaring that by their sins they have forfeited divine protection, and claiming that he has the right to destroy them. He pronounces them just as deserving as himself of exclusion from the favor of God. “Are these,” he says, “the people who are to take my place in heaven, and

the place of the angels who united with me? They profess to obey the law of God; but have they kept its precepts? Have they not been lovers of self more than lovers of God? Have they not placed their own interests above His service? Have they not loved the things of the world? Look at the sins that have marked their lives. Behold their selfishness, their malice, their hatred of one another. Will God banish me and my angels from His presence, and yet reward those who have been guilty of the same sins? Thou canst not do this, O Lord, in justice. Justice demands that sentence be pronounced against them."

But while the followers of Christ have sinned, they have not given themselves up to be controlled by the satanic agencies. They have repented of their sins and have sought the Lord in humility and contrition, and the divine Advocate pleads in their behalf. He who has been most abused by their ingratitude, who knows their sin and also their penitence, declares: "The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan. I gave My life for these souls. They are graven upon the palms of My hands. They may have imperfections of character; they may have failed in their endeavors; but they have repented, and I have forgiven and accepted them."

The assaults of Satan are strong, his delusions are subtle; but the Lord's eye is upon His people. Their affliction is great, the flames of the furnace seem about to consume them; but Jesus will bring them forth as gold tried in the fire. Their earthliness will be removed, that through them the image of Christ may be perfectly revealed.

At times the Lord may seem to have forgotten the perils of His church and the injury done her by her enemies. But

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God has not forgotten. Nothing in this world is so dear to the heart of God as His church. It is not His will that worldly policy shall corrupt her record. He does not leave His people to be overcome by Satan's temptations. He will punish those who misrepresent Him, but He will be gracious to all who sincerely repent. To those who call upon Him for strength for the development of Christian character, He will give all needed help.

In the time of the end the people of God will sigh and cry for the abominations done in the land. With tears they will warn the wicked of their danger in trampling upon the divine law, and with unutterable sorrow they will humble themselves before the Lord in penitence. The wicked will mock their sorrow and ridicule their solemn appeals. But the anguish and humiliation of God's people is unmistakable evidence that they are regaining the strength and nobility of character lost in consequence of sin. It is because they are drawing nearer to Christ, because their eyes are fixed on His perfect purity, that they discern so clearly the exceeding sinfulness of sin. Meekness and lowliness are the conditions of success and victory. A crown of glory awaits those who bow at the foot of the cross.

God's faithful, praying ones are, as it were, shut in with Him. They themselves know not how securely they are shielded. Urged on by Satan, the rulers of this world are seeking to destroy them; but could the eyes of God's children be opened, as were the eyes of Elisha's servant at Dothan, they would see angels of God encamped about them, holding in check the hosts of darkness.

As the people of God afflict their souls before Him, plead-

ing for purity of heart, the command is given, "Take away the filthy garments," and the encouraging words are spoken, "Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment." Zechariah 3:4. The spotless robe of Christ's righteousness is placed upon the tried, tempted, faithful children of God. The despised remnant are clothed in glorious apparel, nevermore to be defiled by the corruptions of the world. Their names are retained in the Lamb's book of life, enrolled among the faithful of all ages. They have resisted the wiles of the deceiver; they have not been turned from their loyalty by the dragon's roar. Now they are eternally secure from the tempter's devices. Their sins are transferred to the originator of sin. A "fair miter" is set upon their heads.

While Satan has been urging his accusations, holy angels, unseen, have been passing to and fro, placing upon the faithful ones the seal of the living God. These are they that stand upon Mount Zion with the Lamb, having the Father's name written in their foreheads. They sing the new song before the throne, that song which no man can learn save the hundred and forty and four thousand which were redeemed from the earth. "These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the first fruits unto God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God." Revelation 14:4, 5.

Now is reached the complete fulfillment of the words of the Angel: "Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, thou, and thy fellows that sit before thee: for they are men wondered at: for, behold, I will bring forth My Servant the Branch."

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Zechariah 3:8. Christ is revealed as the Redeemer and Deliverer of His people. Now indeed are the remnant "men wondered at," as the tears and humiliation of their pilgrimage give place to joy and honor in the presence of God and the Lamb. "In that day shall the branch of the Lord be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that he that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, even everyone that is written among the living in Jerusalem." Isaiah 4:2, 3.

“Not by Might, nor by Power”

IMMEDIATELY after Zechariah's vision of Joshua and the Angel, the prophet received a message regarding the work of Zerubbabel. “The Angel that talked with me,” Zechariah declares, “came again, and waked me, as a man that is wakened out of his sleep, and said unto me, What seest thou? And I said, I have looked, and behold a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof: and two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof.

“So I answered and spake to the Angel that talked with me, saying, What are these, my Lord? . . . Then He answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.”

“Then answered I, and said unto Him, What are these two olive trees upon the right side of the candlestick and upon

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the left side thereof? And I answered again, and said unto Him, What be these two olive branches which through the two golden pipes empty the golden oil out of themselves? . . . Then said He, These are the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth." Zechariah 4:1-6, 11-14.

In this vision the two olive trees which stand before God are represented as emptying the golden oil out of themselves through golden tubes into the bowl of the candlestick. From this the lamps of the sanctuary are fed, that they may give a bright, continuous light. So from the anointed ones that stand in God's presence the fullness of divine light and love and power is imparted to His people, that they may impart to others light and joy and refreshing. Those who are thus enriched are to enrich others with the treasure of God's love.

In rebuilding the house of the Lord, Zerubbabel had labored in the face of manifold difficulties. From the beginning, adversaries had "weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building," "and made them to cease by force and power." Ezra 4:4, 23. But the Lord had interposed in behalf of the builders, and now He spoke through His prophet to Zerubbabel, saying, "Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it." Zechariah 4:7.

Throughout the history of God's people great mountains of difficulty, apparently insurmountable, have loomed up before those who were trying to carry out the purposes of Heaven. Such obstacles are permitted by the Lord as a test of faith. When we are hedged about on every side, this is the time above all others to trust in God and in the power of His

Spirit. The exercise of a living faith means an increase of spiritual strength and the development of an unfaltering trust. It is thus that the soul becomes a conquering power. Before the demand of faith, the obstacles placed by Satan across the pathway of the Christian will disappear; for the powers of heaven will come to his aid. "Nothing shall be impossible unto you." Matthew 17:20:

The way of the world is to begin with pomp and boasting. God's way is to make the day of small things the beginning of the glorious triumph of truth and righteousness. Sometimes He trains His workers by bringing to them disappointment and apparent failure. It is His purpose that they shall learn to master difficulties.

Often men are tempted to falter before the perplexities and obstacles that confront them. But if they will hold the beginning of their confidence steadfast unto the end, God will make the way clear. Success will come to them as they struggle against difficulties. Before the intrepid spirit and unwavering faith of a Zerubbabel, great mountains of difficulty will become a plain; and he whose hands have laid the foundation, even "his hands shall also finish it." "He shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it." Zechariah 4:9, 7.

Human power and human might did not establish the church of God, and neither can they destroy it. Not on the rock of human strength, but on Christ Jesus, the Rock of Ages, was the church founded, "and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Matthew 16:18. The presence of God gives stability to His cause. "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man," is the word that comes to us. Psalm 146:3.

"In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength." Isaiah 30:15. God's glorious work, founded on the eternal principles of right, will never come to nought. It will go on from strength to strength, "not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." Zechariah 4:6.

The promise, "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it," was literally fulfilled. Verse 9. "The elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they builded, and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia. And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar [the twelfth month], which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king." Ezra 6:14, 15.

Shortly afterward the restored temple was dedicated. "The children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of God with joy;" and "upon the fourteenth day of the first month" they "kept the Passover." Verses 16, 17, 19.

The second temple did not equal the first in magnificence, nor was it hallowed by those visible tokens of the divine presence which pertained to the first temple. There was no manifestation of supernatural power to mark its dedication. No cloud of glory was seen to fill the newly erected sanctuary. No fire from heaven descended to consume the sacrifice upon its altar. The Shekinah no longer abode between the cherubim in the most holy place; the ark, the mercy seat, and the tables of testimony were not found there. No sign from heaven

made known to the inquiring priest the will of Jehovah.

And yet this was the building concerning which the Lord had declared by the prophet Haggai: "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former." "I will shake all nations, and the Desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts." Haggai 2:9, 7. For centuries learned men have endeavored to show wherein the promise of God, given to Haggai, has been fulfilled; yet in the advent of Jesus of Nazareth, the Desire of all nations, who by His personal presence hallowed the precincts of the temple, many have steadfastly refused to see any special significance. Pride and unbelief have blinded their minds to the true meaning of the prophet's words.

The second temple was honored, not with the cloud of Jehovah's glory, but with the presence of the One in whom dwelt "all the fullness of the Godhead bodily"—God Himself "manifest in the flesh." Colossians 2:9; 1 Timothy 3:16. In being honored with the personal presence of Christ during His earthly ministry, and in this alone, did the second temple exceed the first in glory. The "Desire of all nations" had indeed come to His temple, when the Man of Nazareth taught and healed in the sacred courts.



chapter 49

In the Days of Queen Esther

UNDER the favor shown them by Cyrus, nearly fifty thousand of the children of the captivity had taken advantage of the decree permitting their return. These, however, in comparison with the hundreds of thousands scattered throughout the provinces of Medo-Persia, were but a mere remnant. The great majority of the Israelites had chosen to remain in the land of their exile rather than undergo the hardships of the return journey and the re-establishment of their desolated cities and homes.

A score or more of years passed by, when a second decree, quite as favorable as the first, was issued by Darius Hystaspes, the monarch then ruling. Thus did God in mercy provide another opportunity for the Jews in the Medo-Persian realm to return to the land of their fathers. The Lord foresaw the troublous times that were to follow during the reign of Xerxes, —the Ahasuerus of the book of Esther,—and He not only wrought a change of feeling in the hearts of men in authority,

King Ahasuerus ordered Haman, the Jews' cruel enemy, to be hanged on his own gallows; thus the Jews were delivered.

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but also inspired Zechariah to plead with the exiles to return.

“Ho, ho, come forth, and flee from the land of the north,” was the message given the scattered tribes of Israel who had become settled in many lands far from their former home. “I have spread you abroad as the four winds of the heaven, saith the Lord. Deliver thyself, O Zion, that dwellest with the daughter of Babylon. For thus saith the Lord of hosts; After the glory hath He sent me unto the nations which spoiled you: for he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of His eye. For, behold, I will shake mine hand upon them, and they shall be a spoil to their servants: and ye shall know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me.” Zechariah 2:6-9.

It was still the Lord’s purpose, as it had been from the beginning, that His people should be a praise in the earth, to the glory of His name. During the long years of their exile He had given them many opportunities to return to their allegiance to Him. Some had chosen to listen and to learn; some had found salvation in the midst of affliction. Many of these were to be numbered among the remnant that should return. They were likened by Inspiration to “the highest branch of the high cedar,” which was to be planted “upon an high mountain and eminent: in the mountain of the height of Israel.” Ezekiel 17:22, 23.

It was those “whose spirit God had raised” (Ezra 1:5) who had returned under the decree of Cyrus. But God ceased not to plead with those who voluntarily remained in the land of their exile, and through manifold agencies He made it possible for them also to return. The large number, however, of those who failed to respond to the decree of Cyrus, remained unimpressible to later influences; and even when

Zechariah warned them to flee from Babylon without further delay, they did not heed the invitation.

Meanwhile conditions in the Medo-Persian realm were rapidly changing. Darius Hystaspes, under whose reign the Jews had been shown marked favor, was succeeded by Xerxes the Great. It was during his reign that those of the Jews who had failed of heeding the message to flee were called upon to face a terrible crisis. Having refused to take advantage of the way of escape God had provided, now they were brought face to face with death.

Through Haman the Agagite, an unscrupulous man high in authority in Medo-Persia, Satan worked at this time to counterwork the purposes of God. Haman cherished bitter malice against Mordecai, a Jew. Mordecai had done Haman no harm, but had simply refused to show him worshipful reverence. Scorning to "lay hands on Mordecai alone," Haman plotted "to destroy all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus, even the people of Mordecai." Esther 3:6.

Misled by the false statements of Haman, Xerxes was induced to issue a decree providing for the massacre of all the Jews "scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces" of the Medo-Persian kingdom. Verse 8. A certain day was appointed on which the Jews were to be destroyed and their property confiscated. Little did the king realize the far-reaching results that would have accompanied the complete carrying out of this decree. Satan himself, the hidden instigator of the scheme, was trying to rid the earth of those who preserved the knowledge of the true God.

"In every province, whithersoever the king's command-

ment and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, and fasting, and weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes." Esther 4:3. The decree of the Medes and Persians could not be revoked; apparently there was no hope; all the Israelites were doomed to destruction.

But the plots of the enemy were defeated by a Power that reigns among the children of men. In the providence of God, Esther, a Jewess who feared the Most High, had been made queen of the Medo-Persian kingdom. Mordecai was a near relative of hers. In their extremity they decided to appeal to Xerxes in behalf of their people. Esther was to venture into his presence as an intercessor. "Who knoweth," said Mordecai, "whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Verse 14.

The crisis that Esther faced demanded quick, earnest action; but both she and Mordecai realized that unless God should work mightily in their behalf, their own efforts would be unavailing. So Esther took time for communion with God, the source of her strength. "Go," she directed Mordecai, "gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish." Verse 16.

The events that followed in rapid succession,—the appearance of Esther before the king, the marked favor shown her, the banquets of the king and queen with Haman as the only guest, the troubled sleep of the king, the public honor shown Mordecai, and the humiliation and fall of Haman upon the discovery of his wicked plot,—all these are parts of a familiar

story. God wrought marvelously for His penitent people; and a counter decree issued by the king, allowing them to fight for their lives, was rapidly communicated to every part of the realm by mounted couriers, who were "hastened and pressed on by the king's commandment." "And in every province, and in every city, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a good day. And many of the people of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews fell upon them." Esther 8:14, 17.

On the day appointed for their destruction, "the Jews gathered themselves together in their cities throughout all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus, to lay hand on such as sought their hurt: and no man could withstand them; for the fear of them fell upon all people." Angels that excel in strength had been commissioned by God to protect His people while they "stood for their lives." Esther 9:2, 16.

Mordecai was given the position of honor formerly occupied by Haman. He "was next unto King Ahasuerus, and great among the Jews, and accepted of the multitude of his brethren" (Esther 10:3); and he sought to promote the welfare of Israel. Thus did God bring His chosen people once more into favor at the Medo-Persian court, making possible the carrying out of His purpose to restore them to their own land. But it was not until several years later, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes I, the successor of Xerxes the Great, that any considerable number returned to Jerusalem, under Ezra.

The trying experiences that came to God's people in the days of Esther were not peculiar to that age alone. The revelator, looking down the ages to the close of time, has declared,

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“The dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.” Revelation 12:17. Some who today are living on the earth will see these words fulfilled. The same spirit that in ages past led men to persecute the true church, will in the future lead to the pursuance of a similar course toward those who maintain their loyalty to God. Even now preparations are being made for this last great conflict.

The decree that will finally go forth against the remnant people of God will be very similar to that issued by Ahasuerus against the Jews. Today the enemies of the true church see in the little company keeping the Sabbath commandment, a Mordecai at the gate. The reverence of God’s people for His law is a constant rebuke to those who have cast off the fear of the Lord and are trampling on His Sabbath.

Satan will arouse indignation against the minority who refuse to accept popular customs and traditions. Men of position and reputation will join with the lawless and the vile to take counsel against the people of God. Wealth, genius, education, will combine to cover them with contempt. Persecuting rulers, ministers, and church members will conspire against them. With voice and pen, by boasts, threats, and ridicule, they will seek to overthrow their faith. By false representations and angry appeals, men will stir up the passions of the people. Not having a “Thus saith the Scriptures” to bring against the advocates of the Bible Sabbath, they will resort to oppressive enactments to supply the lack. To secure popularity and patronage, legislators will yield to the demand for Sunday laws. But those who fear God, cannot accept an

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institution that violates a precept of the Decalogue. On this battlefield will be fought the last great conflict in the controversy between truth and error. And we are not left in doubt as to the issue. Today, as in the days of Esther and Mordecai, the Lord will vindicate His truth and His people.



chapter 50

Ezra, the Priest and Scribe

ABOUT seventy years after the return of the first company of exiles under Zerubbabel and Joshua, Artaxerxes Longimanus came to the throne of Medo-Persia. The name of this king is connected with sacred history by a series of remarkable providences. It was during his reign that Ezra and Nehemiah lived and labored. He is the one who in 457 B.C. issued the third and final decree for the restoration of Jerusalem. His reign saw the return of a company of Jews under Ezra, the completion of the walls of Jerusalem by Nehemiah and his associates, the reorganization of the temple services, and the great religious reforms instituted by Ezra and Nehemiah. During his long rule he often showed favor to God's people, and in his trusted and well-beloved Jewish friends, Ezra and Nehemiah, he recognized men of God's appointment, raised up for a special work.

The experience of Ezra while living among the Jews who remained in Babylon was so unusual that it attracted the favorable notice of King Artaxerxes, with whom he talked

Permission by King Artaxerxes for the return of the exiles brought many Jews back to Jerusalem under Ezra's leadership.

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freely regarding the power of the God of heaven, and the divine purpose in restoring the Jews to Jerusalem.

Born of the sons of Aaron, Ezra had been given a priestly training; and in addition to this he had acquired a familiarity with the writings of the magicians, the astrologers, and the wise men of the Medo-Persian realm. But he was not satisfied with his spiritual condition. He longed to be in full harmony with God; he longed for wisdom to carry out the divine will. And so he “prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it.” Ezra 7:10. This led him to apply himself diligently to a study of the history of God’s people, as recorded in the writings of prophets and kings. He searched the historical and poetical books of the Bible to learn why the Lord had permitted Jerusalem to be destroyed and His people carried captive into a heathen land.

To the experiences of Israel from the time the promise was made to Abraham, Ezra gave special thought. He studied the instruction given at Mount Sinai and through the long period of wilderness wandering. As he learned more and still more concerning God’s dealings with His children, and comprehended the sacredness of the law given at Sinai, Ezra’s heart was stirred. He experienced a new and thorough conversion and determined to master the records of sacred history, that he might use this knowledge to bring blessing and light to his people.

Ezra endeavored to gain a heart preparation for the work he believed was before him. He sought God earnestly, that he might be a wise teacher in Israel. As he learned to yield mind and will to divine control, there were brought into his life the principles of true sanctification, which, in later years,

had a molding influence, not only upon the youth who sought his instruction, but upon all others associated with him.

God chose Ezra to be an instrument of good to Israel, that He might put honor upon the priesthood, the glory of which had been greatly eclipsed during the captivity. Ezra developed into a man of extraordinary learning and became "a ready scribe in the law of Moses." Verse 6. These qualifications made him an eminent man in the Medo-Persian kingdom.

Ezra became a mouthpiece for God, educating those about him in the principles that govern heaven. During the remaining years of his life, whether near the court of the king of Medo-Persia or at Jerusalem, his principal work was that of a teacher. As he communicated to others the truths he learned, his capacity for labor increased. He became a man of piety and zeal. He was the Lord's witness to the world of the power of Bible truth to ennoble the daily life.

The efforts of Ezra to revive an interest in the study of the Scriptures were given permanency by his painstaking, lifelong work of preserving and multiplying the Sacred Writings. He gathered all the copies of the law that he could find and had these transcribed and distributed. The pure word, thus multiplied and placed in the hands of many people, gave knowledge that was of inestimable value.

Ezra's faith that God would do a mighty work for His people, led him to tell Artaxerxes of his desire to return to Jerusalem to revive an interest in the study of God's word and to assist his brethren in restoring the Holy City. As Ezra declared his perfect trust in the God of Israel as one abundantly able to protect and care for His people, the king was deeply impressed. He well understood that the Israelites were

returning to Jerusalem that they might serve Jehovah; yet so great was the king's confidence in the integrity of Ezra that he showed him marked favor, granting his request and bestowing on him rich gifts for the temple service. He made him a special representative of the Medo-Persian kingdom and conferred on him extensive powers for the carrying out of the purposes that were in his heart.

The decree of Artaxerxes Longimanus for the restoring and building of Jerusalem, the third issued since the close of the seventy years' captivity, is remarkable for its expressions regarding the God of heaven, for its recognition of the attainments of Ezra, and for the liberality of the grants made to the remnant people of God. Artaxerxes refers to Ezra as "the priest, the scribe, even a scribe of the words of the commandments of the Lord, and of His statutes to Israel;" "a scribe of the law of the God of heaven." The king united with his counselors in offering freely "unto the God of Israel, whose habitation is in Jerusalem;" and in addition he made provision for meeting many heavy expenses by ordering that they be paid "out of the king's treasure house." Verses 11, 12, 15, 20.

"Thou art sent of the king, and of his seven counselors," Artaxerxes declared to Ezra, "to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, according to the law of thy God which is in thine hand." And he further decreed: "Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be diligently done for the house of the God of heaven: for why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons?" Verses 14, 23.

In giving permission to the Israelites to return, Artaxerxes arranged for the restoration of the members of the priesthood

EZRA, THE PRIEST AND SCRIBE

to their ancient rites and privileges. "We certify you," he declared, "that touching any of the priests and Levites, singers, porters, Nethinims, or ministers of this house of God, it shall not be lawful to impose toll, tribute, or custom, upon them." He also arranged for the appointment of civil officers to govern the people justly in accordance with the Jewish code of laws. "Thou, Ezra, after the wisdom of thy God, that is in thine hand," he directed, "set magistrates and judges, which may judge all the people that are beyond the river, all such as know the laws of thy God; and teach ye them that know them not. And whosoever will not do the law of thy God, and the law of the king, let judgment be executed



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speedily upon him, whether it be unto death, or to banishment, or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment." Verses 24-26.

Thus, "according to the good hand of his God upon him," Ezra had persuaded the king to make abundant provision for the return of all the people of Israel and of the priests and Levites in the Medo-Persian realm, who were minded "of their own free will to go up to Jerusalem." Verses 9, 13. Thus again the children of the dispersion were given opportunity to return to the land with the possession of which were linked the promises to the house of Israel. This decree brought great rejoicing to those who had been uniting with Ezra in a study of God's purposes concerning His people. "Blessed be the Lord God of our fathers," Ezra exclaimed, "which hath put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem: and hath extended mercy unto me before the king, and his counselors, and before all the king's mighty princes." Verses 27, 28.

In the issuing of this decree by Artaxerxes, God's providence was manifest. Some discerned this and gladly took advantage of the privilege of returning under circumstances so favorable. A general place of meeting was named, and at the appointed time those who were desirous of going to Jerusalem assembled for the long journey. "I gathered them together to the river that runneth to Ahava," Ezra says, "and there abode we in tents three days." Ezra 8:15.

Ezra had expected that a large number would return to Jerusalem, but the number who responded to the call was disappointingly small. Many who had acquired houses and lands had no desire to sacrifice these possessions. They loved

ease and comfort and were well satisfied to remain. Their example proved a hindrance to others who otherwise might have chosen to cast in their lot with those who were advancing by faith.

As Ezra looked over the company assembled, he was surprised to find none of the sons of Levi. Where were the members of the tribe that had been set apart for the sacred service of the temple? To the call, Who is on the Lord's side? the Levites should have been the first to respond. During the captivity, and afterward, they had been granted many privileges. They had enjoyed the fullest liberty to minister to the spiritual needs of their brethren in exile. Synagogues had been built, in which the priests conducted the worship of God and instructed the people. The observance of the Sabbath, and the performance of the sacred rites peculiar to the Jewish faith, had been freely allowed.

But with the passing of the years after the close of the captivity, conditions changed, and many new responsibilities rested upon the leaders in Israel. The temple at Jerusalem had been rebuilt and dedicated, and more priests were needed to carry on its services. There was pressing need of men of God to act as teachers of the people. And besides, the Jews remaining in Babylon were in danger of having their religious liberty restricted. Through the prophet Zechariah, as well as by their recent experience during the troublous times of Esther and Mordecai, the Jews in Medo-Persia had been plainly warned to return to their own land. The time had come when it was perilous for them to dwell longer in the midst of heathen influences. In view of these changed conditions, the priests in Babylon should have been quick to dis-

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cern in the issuance of the decree a special call to them to return to Jerusalem.

The king and his princes had done more than their part in opening the way for the return. They had provided abundant means, but where were the men? The sons of Levi failed at a time when the influence of a decision to accompany their brethren would have led others to follow their example. Their strange indifference is a sad revelation of the attitude of the Israelites in Babylon toward God's purpose for His people.

Once more Ezra appealed to the Levites, sending them an urgent invitation to unite with his company. To emphasize the importance of quick action, he sent with his written plea several of his "chief men" and "men of understanding." Ezra 7:28; 8:16.

While the travelers tarried with Ezra, these trusted messengers hastened back with the plea, "Bring unto us ministers for the house of our God." Ezra 8:17. The appeal was heeded;



some who had been halting, made final decision to return. In all, about forty priests and two hundred and twenty Nethinim—men upon whom Ezra could rely as wise ministers and good teachers and helpers—were brought to the camp.

All were now ready to set forth. Before them was a journey that would occupy several months. The men were taking with them their wives and children, and their substance, besides large treasure for the temple and its service. Ezra was aware that enemies lay in wait by the way, ready to plunder and destroy him and his company; yet he had asked from the king no armed force for protection. "I was ashamed," he has explained, "to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way: because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek Him; but His power and His wrath is against all them that forsake Him." Verse 22.

In this matter, Ezra and his companions saw an opportunity to magnify the name of God before the heathen. Faith in the power of the living God would be strengthened if the Israelites themselves should now reveal implicit faith in their divine Leader. They therefore determined to put their trust wholly in Him. They would ask for no guard of soldiers. They would give the heathen no occasion to ascribe to the strength of man the glory that belongs to God alone. They could not afford to arouse in the minds of their heathen friends one doubt as to the sincerity of their dependence on God as His people. Strength would be gained, not through wealth, not through the power and influence of idolatrous men, but through the favor of God. Only by keeping the law of the Lord before them, and striving to obey it, would they be protected.

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This knowledge of the conditions under which they would continue to enjoy the prospering hand of God, lent more than ordinary solemnity to the consecration service that was held by Ezra and his company of faithful souls just before their departure. “I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava,” Ezra has declared of this experience, “that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of Him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance.” “So we fasted and besought our God for this: and He was entreated of us.” Verses 21, 23.

The blessing of God, however, did not make unnecessary the exercise of prudence and forethought. As a special precaution in safeguarding the treasure, Ezra “separated twelve of the chief of the priests”—men whose faithfulness and fidelity had been proved—“and weighed unto them the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, even the offering of the house of our God, which the king, and his counselors, and his lords, and all Israel there present, had offered.” These men were solemnly charged to act as vigilant stewards over the treasure entrusted to their care. “Ye are holy unto the Lord,” Ezra declared; “the vessels are holy also; and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering unto the Lord God of your fathers. Watch ye, and keep them, until ye weigh them before the chief of the priests and the Levites, and chief of the fathers of Israel, at Jerusalem, in the chambers of the house of the Lord.” Verses 24, 25, 28, 29.

The care exercised by Ezra in providing for the transportation and safety of the Lord’s treasure, teaches a lesson worthy of thoughtful study. Only those whose trustworthiness had been proved were chosen, and they were instructed plainly

regarding the responsibility resting on them. In the appointment of faithful officers to act as treasurers of the Lord's goods, Ezra recognized the necessity and value of order and organization in connection with the work of God.

During the few days that the Israelites tarried at the river, every provision was completed for the long journey. "We departed," Ezra writes, "on the twelfth day of the first month, to go unto Jerusalem: and the hand of our God was upon us, and He delivered us from the hand of the enemy, and of such as lay in wait by the way." Verse 31. About four months were occupied on the journey, the multitude that accompanied Ezra, several thousand in all, including women and children, necessitating slow progress. But all were preserved in safety. Their enemies were restrained from harming them. Their journey was a prosperous one, and on the first day of the fifth month, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes, they reached Jerusalem.

chapter 51

A Spiritual Revival

EZRA'S arrival in Jerusalem was opportune. There was great need of the influence of his presence. His coming brought courage and hope to the hearts of many who had long labored under difficulties. Since the return of the first company of exiles under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua, over seventy years before, much had been accomplished. The temple had been finished, and the walls of the city had been partially repaired. Yet much remained undone.

Among those who had returned to Jerusalem in former years, there were many who had remained true to God as long as they lived; but a considerable number of the children and the children's children lost sight of the sacredness of God's law. Even some of the men entrusted with responsibilities were living in open sin. Their course was largely neutralizing the efforts made by others to advance the cause of God; for so long as flagrant violations of the law were

allowed to go unrebuked, the blessing of Heaven could not rest upon the people.

It was in the providence of God that those who returned with Ezra had had special seasons of seeking the Lord. The experiences through which they had just passed, on their journey from Babylon, unprotected as they had been by any human power, had taught them rich spiritual lessons. Many had grown strong in faith; and as these mingled with the discouraged and the indifferent in Jerusalem, their influence was a powerful factor in the reform soon afterward instituted.

On the fourth day after the arrival, the treasures of silver and gold, with the vessels for the service of the sanctuary, were delivered by the treasurers into the hands of the temple officers, in the presence of witnesses, and with the utmost exactitude. Every article was examined "by number and by weight." Ezra 8:34.

The children of the captivity who had returned with Ezra "offered burnt offerings unto the God of Israel" for a sin offering and as a token of their gratitude and thanksgiving for the protection of holy angels during the journey. "And they delivered the king's commissions unto the king's lieutenants, and to the governors on this side the river: and they furthered the people, and the house of God." Verses 35, 36.

Very soon thereafter a few of the chief men of Israel approached Ezra with a serious complaint. Some of "the people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites" had so far disregarded the holy commands of Jehovah as to intermarry with the surrounding peoples. "They have taken of their daughters for themselves, and for their sons," Ezra was told, "so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the

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people” of heathen lands; “yea, the hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this trespass.” Ezra 9:1, 2.

In his study of the causes leading to the Babylonish captivity, Ezra had learned that Israel’s apostasy was largely traceable to their mingling with heathen nations. He had seen that if they had obeyed God’s command to keep separate from the nations surrounding them, they would have been spared many sad and humiliating experiences. Now when he learned that notwithstanding the lessons of the past, men of prominence had dared transgress the laws given as a safeguard against apostasy, his heart was stirred within him. He thought of God’s goodness in again giving His people a foothold in their native land, and he was overwhelmed with righteous indignation and with grief at their ingratitude. “When I heard this thing,” he says, “I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonished.

“Then were assembled unto me everyone that trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the transgression



of those that had been carried away; and I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice." Verses 3, 4.

At the time of the evening sacrifice Ezra rose, and, once more rending his garment and his mantle, he fell upon his knees and unburdened his soul in supplication to Heaven. Spreading out his hands unto the Lord, he exclaimed, "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to Thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens.

"Since the days of our fathers," the suppliant continued, "have we been in a great trespass unto this day; and for our iniquities have we, our kings, and our priests, been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, and to a spoil, and to confusion of face, as it is this day. And now for a little space grace hath been showed from the Lord our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a nail in His holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage. For we were bondmen; yet our God hath not forsaken us in our bondage, but hath extended mercy unto us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us a reviving, to set up the house of our God, and to repair the desolations thereof, and to give us a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem.

"And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? for we have forsaken Thy commandments, which Thou hast commanded by Thy servants the prophets. . . . And after all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, seeing that Thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and hast given us such deliverance as this; should we again break Thy commandments, and join

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in affinity with the people of these abominations? wouldest not Thou be angry with us till Thou hadst consumed us, so that there should be no remnant nor escaping? O Lord God of Israel, Thou art righteous: for we remain yet escaped, as it is this day: behold, we are before Thee in our trespasses: for we cannot stand before Thee because of this." Verses 6-15.

The sorrow of Ezra and his associates over the evils that had insidiously crept into the very heart of the Lord's work, wrought repentance. Many of those who had sinned were deeply affected. "The people wept very sore." Ezra 10:1. In a limited degree they began to realize the heinousness of sin and the horror with which God regards it. They saw the sacredness of the law spoken at Sinai, and many trembled at the thought of their transgressions.

One of those present, Shechaniah by name, acknowledged as true all the words spoken by Ezra. "We have trespassed against our God," he confessed, "and have taken strange wives of the people of the land: yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing." Shechaniah proposed that all who had transgressed should make a covenant with God to forsake their sin and to be adjudged "according to the law." "Arise," he bade Ezra; "for this matter belongeth unto thee: we also will be with thee: be of good courage." "Then arose Ezra, and made the chief priests, the Levites, and all Israel, to swear that they should do according to this word." Verses 2-5.

This was the beginning of a wonderful reformation. With infinite patience and tact, and with a careful consideration for the rights and welfare of every individual concerned, Ezra and his associates strove to lead the penitent of Israel into the right way. Above all else, Ezra was a teacher of the law;

and as he gave personal attention to the examination of every case, he sought to impress the people with the holiness of this law and the blessings to be gained through obedience.

Wherever Ezra labored, there sprang up a revival in the study of the Holy Scriptures. Teachers were appointed to instruct the people; the law of the Lord was exalted and made honorable. The books of the prophets were searched, and the passages foretelling the coming of the Messiah brought hope and comfort to many a sad and weary heart.

More than two thousand years have passed since Ezra “prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it” (Ezra 7:10), yet the lapse of time has not lessened the influence of his pious example. Through the centuries the record of his life of consecration has inspired many with the determination “to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it.”

Ezra’s motives were high and holy; in all that he did he was actuated by a deep love for souls. The compassion and tenderness that he revealed toward those who had sinned, either willfully or through ignorance, should be an object lesson to all who seek to bring about reforms. The servants of God are to be as firm as a rock where right principles are involved; and yet, withal, they are to manifest sympathy and forbearance. Like Ezra, they are to teach transgressors the way of life by inculcating principles that are the foundation of all rightdoing.

In this age of the world, when Satan is seeking, through manifold agencies, to blind the eyes of men and women to the binding claims of the law of God, there is need of men who can cause many to “tremble at the commandment of our God.” Ezra 10:3. There is need of true reformers, who

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will point transgressors to the great Lawgiver and teach them that “the law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul.” Psalm 19:7. There is need of men mighty in the Scriptures, men whose every word and act exalts the statutes of Jehovah, men who seek to strengthen faith. Teachers are needed, oh, so much, who will inspire hearts with reverence and love for the Scriptures.

The widespread iniquity prevalent today may in a great degree be attributed to a failure to study and obey the Scriptures, for when the word of God is set aside, its power to restrain the evil passions of the natural heart is rejected. Men sow to the flesh and of the flesh reap corruption.

With the setting aside of the Bible has come a turning away from God’s law. The doctrine that men are released from obedience to the divine precepts, has weakened the force of moral obligation and opened the floodgates of iniquity upon the world. Lawlessness, dissipation, and corruption are sweeping in like an overwhelming flood. Everywhere are seen envy, evil surmising, hypocrisy, estrangement, emulation, strife, betrayal of sacred trusts, indulgence of lust. The whole system of religious principles and doctrines, which should form the foundation and framework of social life, seems to be a tottering mass, ready to fall in ruins.

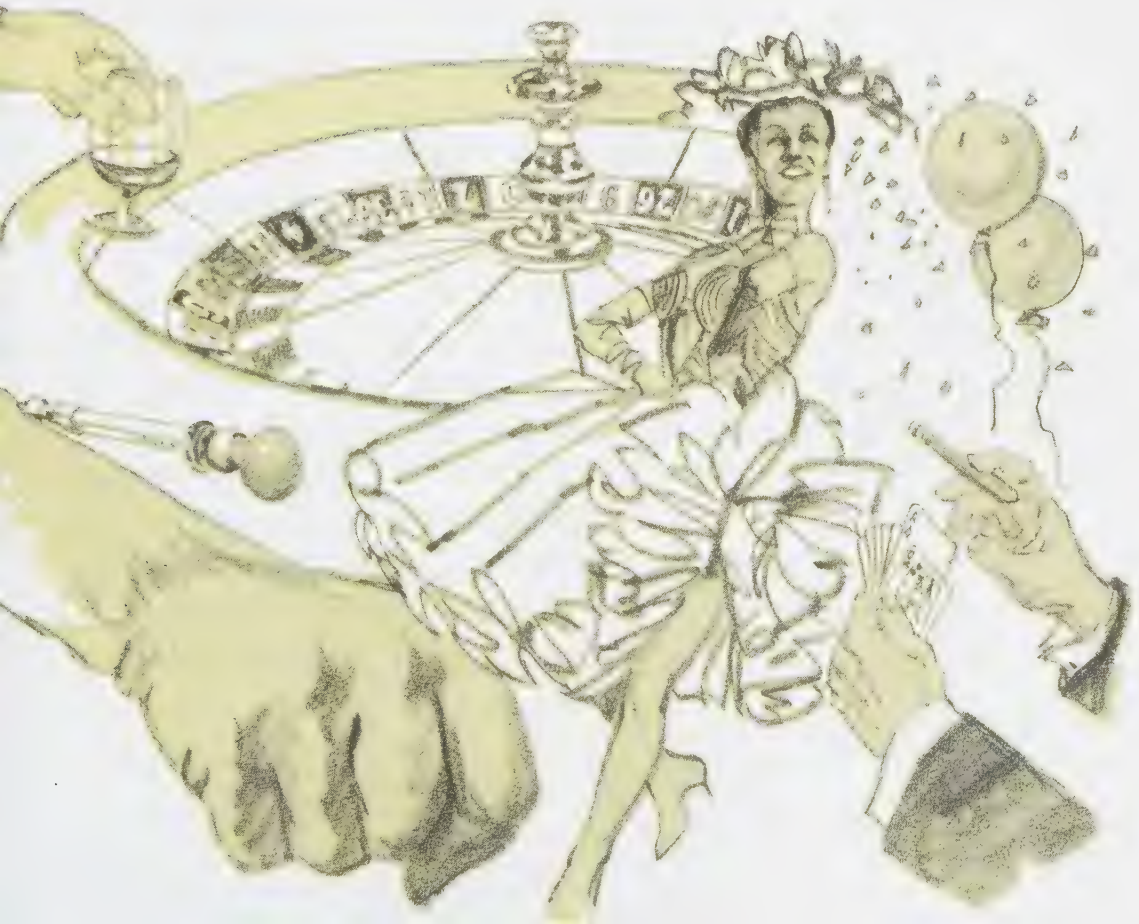
In the last days of this earth’s history the voice that spoke from Sinai is still declaring, “Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.” Exodus 20:3. Man has set his will against the will of God, but he cannot silence the word of command. The human mind cannot evade its obligation to a higher power. Theories and speculations may abound; men may try to set science in opposition to revelation, and thus do away

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with God's law; but stronger and still stronger comes the command, "*Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.*" Matthew 4:10.

There is no such thing as weakening or strengthening the law of Jehovah. As it has been, so it is. It always has been, and always will be, holy, just, and good, complete in itself. It cannot be repealed or changed. To "honor" or "dishonor" it is but the speech of men.

Between the laws of men and the precepts of Jehovah will come the last great conflict of the controversy between truth and error. Upon this battle we are now entering—a battle not between rival churches contending for the supremacy, but between the religion of the Bible and the religions of fable and tradition. The agencies which have united against



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truth are now actively at work. God's Holy Word, which has been handed down to us at so great a cost of suffering and bloodshed, is little valued. There are few who really accept it as the rule of life. Infidelity prevails to an alarming extent, not in the world only, but in the church. Many have come to deny doctrines which are the very pillars of the Christian faith. The great facts of creation as presented by the inspired writers, the fall of man, the atonement, the perpetuity of the law—these all are practically rejected by a large share of the professedly Christian world. Thousands who pride themselves on their knowledge regard it as an evidence of weakness to place implicit confidence in the Bible, and a proof of learning to cavil at the Scriptures and to spiritualize and explain away their most important truths.

Christians should be preparing for what is soon to break upon the world as an overwhelming surprise, and this preparation they should make by diligently studying the word of God and striving to conform their lives to its precepts. The tremendous issues of eternity demand of us something besides an imaginary religion, a religion of words and forms, where truth is kept in the outer court. God calls for a revival and a reformation. The words of the Bible, and the Bible alone, should be heard from the pulpit. But the Bible has been robbed of its power, and the result is seen in a lowering of the tone of spiritual life. In many sermons of today there is not that divine manifestation which awakens the conscience and brings life to the soul. The hearers cannot say, "Did not our heart burn within us, while He talked with us by the way, and while He opened to us the Scriptures?" Luke 24:32. There are many who are crying out for the living God, long-

ing for the divine presence. Let the word of God speak to the heart. Let those who have heard only tradition and human theories and maxims, hear the voice of Him who can renew the soul unto eternal life.

Great light shone forth from patriarchs and prophets. Glorious things were spoken of Zion, the City of God. Thus the Lord designs that the light shall shine forth through His followers today. If the saints of the Old Testament bore so bright a testimony of loyalty, should not those upon whom is shining the accumulated light of centuries, bear a still more signal witness to the power of truth? The glory of the prophecies sheds their light upon our pathway. Type has met antitype in the death of God's Son. Christ has risen from the dead, proclaiming over the rent sepulcher, "I am the resurrection, and the life." John 11:25. He has sent His Spirit into the world to bring all things to our remembrance. By a miracle of power He has preserved His written word through the ages.

The Reformers whose protest has given us the name of Protestant, felt that God had called them to give the light of the gospel to the world; and in the effort to do this they were ready to sacrifice their possessions, their liberty, even life itself. In the face of persecution and death the gospel was proclaimed far and near. The word of God was carried to the people; and all classes, high and low, rich and poor, learned and ignorant, eagerly studied it for themselves. Are we, in this last conflict of the great controversy, as faithful to our trust as the early Reformers were to theirs?

"Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly: gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assem-

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ble the elders, gather the children: . . . let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare Thy people, O Lord, and give not Thine heritage to reproach.” “Turn ye even to Me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: and rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth Him of the evil. Who knoweth if He will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind Him?” Joel 2:15-17, 12-14.

chapter 52

This chapter is based on Nehemiah 1; 2.

A Man of Opportunity

NEHEMIAH, one of the Hebrew exiles, occupied a position of influence and honor in the Persian court. As cupbearer to the king he was admitted freely to the royal presence. By virtue of his position, and because of his abilities and fidelity, he had become the monarch's friend and counselor. The recipient of royal favor, however, though surrounded by pomp and splendor, did not forget his God nor his people. With deepest interest his heart turned toward Jerusalem; his hopes and joys were bound up with her prosperity. Through this man, prepared by his residence in the Persian court for the work to which he was to be called, God purposed to bring blessing to His people in the land of their fathers.

By messengers from Judea the Hebrew patriot learned that days of trial had come to Jerusalem, the chosen city. The returned exiles were suffering affliction and reproach. The temple and portions of the city had been rebuilt; but the

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work of restoration was hindered, the temple services were disturbed, and the people kept in constant alarm by the fact that the walls of the city were still largely in ruins.

Overwhelmed with sorrow, Nehemiah could neither eat nor drink; he “wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted.” In his grief he turned to the divine Helper. “I . . . prayed,” he said, “before the God of heaven.” Faithfully he made confession of his sins and the sins of his people. He pleaded that God would maintain the cause of Israel, restore their courage and strength, and help them to build up the waste places of Judah.

As Nehemiah prayed, his faith and courage grew strong. His mouth was filled with holy arguments. He pointed to the dishonor that would be cast upon God, if His people, now that they had returned to Him, should be left in weakness and oppression; and he urged the Lord to bring to pass His promise: “If ye turn unto Me, and keep My commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set My name there.” See Deuteronomy 4:29-31. This promise had been given to Israel through Moses before they had entered Canaan, and during the centuries it had stood unchanged. God’s people had now returned to Him in penitence and faith, and His promise would not fail.

Nehemiah had often poured out his soul in behalf of his people. But now as he prayed a holy purpose formed in his mind. He resolved that if he could obtain the consent of the king, and the necessary aid in procuring implements and material, he would himself undertake the task of rebuilding

the walls of Jerusalem and restoring Israel's national strength. And he asked the Lord to grant him favor in the sight of the king, that this plan might be carried out. "Prosper, I pray Thee, Thy servant this day," he entreated, "and grant him mercy in the sight of this man."

Four months Nehemiah waited for a favorable opportunity to present his request to the king. During this time, though his heart was heavy with grief, he endeavored to bear himself with cheerfulness in the royal presence. In those halls of luxury and splendor all must appear lighthearted and happy. Distress must not cast its shadow over the countenance of any attendant of royalty. But in Nehemiah's seasons of retirement, concealed from human sight, many were the prayers, the confessions, the tears, heard and witnessed by God and angels.

At length the sorrow that burdened the patriot's heart could no longer be concealed. Sleepless nights and care-filled days left their trace upon his countenance. The king, jealous for his own safety, was accustomed to read countenances and to penetrate disguises, and he saw that some secret trouble was preying upon his cupbearer. "Why is thy countenance sad," he inquired, "seeing thou art not sick? this is nothing else but sorrow of heart."

The question filled Nehemiah with apprehension. Would not the king be angry to hear that while outwardly engaged in his service, the courtier's thoughts had been far away with his afflicted people? Would not the offender's life be forfeited? His cherished plan for restoring the strength of Jerusalem—was it about to be overthrown? "Then," he writes, "I was very sore afraid." With trembling lips and tearful eyes

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he revealed the cause of his sorrow. "Let the king live forever," he answered. "Why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchers, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?"

The recital of the condition of Jerusalem awakened the sympathy of the monarch without arousing his prejudices. Another question gave the opportunity for which Nehemiah had long waited: "For what dost thou make request?" But the man of God did not venture to reply till he had sought direction from One higher than Artaxerxes. He had a sacred trust to fulfill, in which he required help from the king; and he realized that much depended upon his presenting the matter in such a way as to win his approval and enlist his aid. "I prayed," he said, "to the God of heaven." In that brief prayer Nehemiah pressed into the presence of the King of kings and won to his side a power that can turn hearts as the rivers of waters are turned.

To pray as Nehemiah prayed in his hour of need is a resource at the command of the Christian under circumstances when other forms of prayer may be impossible. Toilers in the busy walks of life, crowded and almost overwhelmed with perplexity, can send up a petition to God for divine guidance. Travelers by sea and land, when threatened with some great danger, can thus commit themselves to Heaven's protection. In times of sudden difficulty or peril the heart may send up its cry for help to One who has pledged Himself to come to the aid of His faithful, believing ones whenever they call upon Him. In every circumstance, under every condition, the soul weighed down with grief and care, or fiercely assailed by temptation, may find assurance, support, and suc-

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cor in the unfailing love and power of a covenant-keeping God.

Nehemiah, in that brief moment of prayer to the King of kings, gathered courage to tell Artaxerxes of his desire to be released for a time from his duties at the court, and he asked for authority to build up the waste places of Jerusalem and to make it once more a strong and defended city. Momentous results to the Jewish nation hung upon this request. "And," Nehemiah declares, "the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me."

Having secured the help he sought, Nehemiah with prudence and forethought proceeded to make the arrangements necessary to ensure the success of the enterprise. He neglected no precaution that would tend to its accomplishment. Not even to his own countrymen did he reveal his purpose. While he knew that many would rejoice in his success, he feared that some, by acts of indiscretion, might arouse the jealousy of their enemies and perhaps bring about the defeat of the undertaking.



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His request to the king had been so favorably received that Nehemiah was encouraged to ask for still further assistance. To give dignity and authority to his mission, as well as to provide protection on the journey, he asked for and secured a military escort. He obtained royal letters to the governors of the provinces beyond the Euphrates, the territory through which he must pass on his way to Judea; and he obtained, also, a letter to the keeper of the king's forest in the mountains of Lebanon, directing him to furnish such timber as would be needed. That there might be no occasion for complaint that he had exceeded his commission, Nehemiah was careful to have the authority and privileges accorded him, clearly defined.

This example of wise forethought and resolute action should be a lesson to all Christians. God's children are not only to pray in faith, but to work with diligent and provident care. They encounter many difficulties and often hinder the working of Providence in their behalf, because they regard prudence and painstaking effort as having little to do with religion. Nehemiah did not regard his duty done when he had wept and prayed before the Lord. He united his petitions with holy endeavor, putting forth earnest, prayerful efforts for the success of the enterprise in which he was engaged. Careful consideration and well-matured plans are as essential to the carrying forward of sacred enterprises today as in the time of the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls.

Nehemiah did not depend upon uncertainty. The means that he lacked he solicited from those who were able to bestow. And the Lord is still willing to move upon the hearts of those in possession of His goods, in behalf of the cause of truth.

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Those who labor for Him are to avail themselves of the help that He prompts men to give. These gifts may open ways by which the light of truth shall go to many benighted lands. The donors may have no faith in Christ, no acquaintance with His word; but their gifts are not on this account to be refused.



chapter 53

This chapter is based on Nehemiah 2; 3; and 4.

The Builders on the Wall

NEHEMIAH'S journey to Jerusalem was accomplished in safety. The royal letters to the governors of the provinces along his route secured him honorable reception and prompt assistance. No enemy dared molest the official who was guarded by the power of the Persian king and treated with marked consideration by the provincial rulers. His arrival in Jerusalem, however, with a military escort, showing that he had come on some important mission, excited the jealousy of the heathen tribes living near the city, who had so often indulged their enmity against the Jews by heaping upon them injury and insult. Foremost in this evil work were certain chiefs of these tribes, Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian. From the first these leaders watched with critical eyes the movements of Nehemiah and endeavored by every means in their power to thwart his plans and hinder his work.

Nehemiah continued to exercise the same caution and prudence that had hitherto marked his course. Knowing that

Under Nehemiah's inspirational direction
the builders resumed the work of restoring
the broken-down walls of Jerusalem.

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bitter and determined enemies stood ready to oppose him, he concealed the nature of his mission from them until a study of the situation should enable him to form his plans. Thus he hoped to secure the co-operation of the people and set them at work before the opposition of his enemies should be aroused.

Choosing a few men whom he knew to be worthy of confidence, Nehemiah told them of the circumstances that had led him to come to Jerusalem, the object that he wished to accomplish, and the plans he proposed to follow. Their interest in his undertaking was at once enlisted and their assistance secured.

On the third night after his arrival Nehemiah rose at midnight and with a few trusted companions went out to view for himself the desolation of Jerusalem. Mounted on his mule, he passed from one part of the city to another, surveying the broken-down walls and gates of the city of his fathers. Painful reflections filled the mind of the Jewish patriot as with sorrow-stricken heart he gazed upon the ruined defenses of his beloved Jerusalem. Memories of Israel's past greatness stood out in sharp contrast with the evidences of her humiliation.

In secrecy and silence Nehemiah completed his circuit of the walls. "The rulers knew not whither I went," he declares, "or what I did; neither had I as yet told it to the Jews, nor to the priests, nor to the nobles, nor to the rulers, nor to the rest that did the work." The remainder of the night he spent in prayer; for he knew that the morning would call for earnest effort to arouse and unite his dispirited and divided countrymen.

Nehemiah bore a royal commission requiring the inhabi-

tants to co-operate with him in rebuilding the walls of the city, but he did not depend upon the exercise of authority. He sought rather to gain the confidence and sympathy of the people, knowing that a union of hearts as well as of hands was essential in the great work before him. When on the morrow he called the people together he presented such arguments as were calculated to arouse their dormant energies and unite their scattered numbers.

Nehemiah's hearers did not know, neither did he tell them, of his midnight circuit of the night before. But the fact that he had made this circuit contributed greatly to his success; for he was able to speak of the condition of the city with an accuracy and a minuteness that astonished his hearers. The impression made upon him as he had looked upon the weakness and degradation of Jerusalem, gave earnestness and power to his words.

Nehemiah presented before the people their reproach among the heathen—their religion dishonored, their God blasphemed. He told them that in a distant land he had heard of their affliction, that he had entreated the favor of Heaven in their behalf, and that, as he was praying, he had determined to ask permission from the king to come to their assistance. He had asked God that the king might not only grant this permission, but might also invest him with the authority and give him the help needed for the work; and his prayer had been answered in such a way as to show that the plan was of the Lord.

All this he related, and then, having shown that he was sustained by the combined authority of the God of Israel and the Persian king, Nehemiah asked the people directly

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whether they would take advantage of this opportunity and arise and build the wall.

The appeal went straight to their hearts. The thought of how Heaven's favor had been manifested toward them put their fears to shame, and with new courage they said with one voice, "Let us rise up and build." "So they strengthened their hands for this good work."

Nehemiah's whole soul was in the enterprise he had undertaken. His hope, his energy, his enthusiasm, his determination, were contagious, inspiring others with the same high courage and lofty purpose. Each man became a Nehemiah in his turn and helped to make stronger the heart and hand of his neighbor.

When the enemies of Israel heard what the Jews were hoping to accomplish, they laughed them to scorn, saying, "What is this thing that ye do? will ye rebel against the king?" But Nehemiah answered, "The God of heaven, He will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build: but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem."

Among the first to catch Nehemiah's spirit of zeal and earnestness were the priests. Because of their influential position, these men could do much to advance or hinder the work; and their ready co-operation, at the very outset, contributed not a little to its success. The majority of the princes and rulers of Israel came up nobly to their duty, and these faithful men have honorable mention in the book of God. There were a few, the Tekoite nobles, who "put not their necks to the work of their Lord." The memory of these slothful servants is branded with shame and has been handed down as a warning to all future generations.

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In every religious movement there are some who, while they cannot deny that the cause is God's, still hold themselves aloof, refusing to make any effort to help. It were well for such ones to remember the record kept on high—that book in which there are no omissions, no mistakes, and out of which they will be judged. There every neglected opportunity to do service for God is recorded; and there, too, every deed of faith and love is held in everlasting remembrance.

Against the inspiring influence of Nehemiah's presence the example of the Tekoite nobles had little weight. The people in general were animated by patriotism and zeal. Men of ability and influence organized the various classes of citizens into companies, each leader making himself responsible for the erection of a certain part of the wall. And of some it is written that they builded "everyone over against his house."

Nor did Nehemiah's energy abate, now that the work was actually begun. With tireless vigilance he superintended the building, directing the workmen, noting the hindrances, and providing for emergencies. Along the whole extent of that three miles of wall his influence was constantly felt. With timely words he encouraged the fearful, aroused the laggard, and approved the diligent. And ever he watched the movements of their enemies, who from time to time collected at a distance and engaged in conversation, as if plotting mischief, and then, drawing nearer the workmen, attempted to divert their attention.

In his many activities Nehemiah did not forget the source of his strength. His heart was constantly uplifted to God, the great Overseer of all. "The God of heaven," he exclaimed,

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"He will prosper us;" and the words, echoed and re-echoed, thrilled the hearts of all the workers on the wall.

But the restoration of the defenses of Jerusalem did not go forward unhindered. Satan was working to stir up opposition and bring discouragement. Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem, his principal agents in this movement, now set themselves to hinder the work of rebuilding. They endeavored to cause division among the workmen. They ridiculed the efforts of the builders, declaring the enterprise an impossibility and predicting failure.

"What do these feeble Jews?" exclaimed Sanballat mockingly; "will they fortify themselves? . . . will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned?" Tobiah, still more contemptuous, added, "Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall."

The builders were soon beset by more active opposition. They were compelled to guard continually against the plots of their adversaries, who, professing friendliness, sought in various ways to cause confusion and perplexity, and to arouse distrust. They endeavored to destroy the courage of the Jews; they formed conspiracies to draw Nehemiah into their toils; and falsehearted Jews were found ready to aid the treacherous undertaking. The report was spread that Nehemiah was plotting against the Persian monarch, intending to exalt himself as a king over Israel, and that all who aided him were traitors.

But Nehemiah continued to look to God for guidance and support, and "the people had a mind to work." The enterprise went forward until the gaps were filled and the entire wall built up to half its intended height.



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As the enemies of Israel saw how unavailing were their efforts, they were filled with rage. Hitherto they had not dared employ violent measures, for they knew that Nehemiah and his companions were acting under the king's commission, and they feared that active opposition against him might bring upon them the monarch's displeasure. But now in their anger they themselves became guilty of the crime of which they had accused Nehemiah. Assembling for counsel, they "conspired all of them together to come and to fight against Jerusalem."

At the same time that the Samaritans were plotting against Nehemiah and his work, some of the leading men among the Jews, becoming disaffected, sought to discourage him by exaggerating the difficulties attending the enterprise. "The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed," they said, "and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall."

Discouragement came from still another source. "The Jews which dwelt by," those who were taking no part in the work, gathered up the statements and reports of their enemies and used these to weaken courage and create disaffection.

But taunts and ridicule, opposition and threats, seemed only to inspire Nehemiah with firmer determination and to arouse him to greater watchfulness. He recognized the dangers that must be met in this warfare with their enemies, but his courage was undaunted. "We made our prayer unto our God," he declares, "and set a watch against them day and night." "Therefore set I in the lower places behind the wall, and on the higher places, I even set the people after their families with their swords, their spears, and their bows. And

I looked, and rose up, and said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, Be not ye afraid of them: remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses.

“And it came to pass, when our enemies heard that it was known unto us, and God had brought their counsel to nought, that we returned all of us to the wall, everyone unto his work. And it came to pass from that time forth, that the half of my servants wrought in the work, and the other half of them held both the spears, the shields, and the bows, and the habergeons. . . . They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, everyone with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon. For the builders, everyone had his sword girded by his side, and so builded.”

Beside Nehemiah stood a trumpeter, and on different parts of the wall were stationed priests bearing the sacred trumpets. The people were scattered in their labors, but on the approach of danger at any point a signal was given for them to repair thither without delay. “So we labored in the work,” Nehemiah says, “and half of them held the spears from the rising of the morning till the stars appeared.”

Those who had been living in towns and villages outside Jerusalem were now required to lodge within the walls, both to guard the work and to be ready for duty in the morning. This would prevent unnecessary delay, and would cut off the opportunity which the enemy would otherwise improve, of attacking the workmen as they went to and from their homes. Nehemiah and his companions did not shrink from hardship

or trying service. Neither by day nor night, not even during the short time given to sleep, did they put off their clothing or lay aside their armor.

The opposition and discouragement that the builders in Nehemiah's day met from open enemies and pretended friends is typical of the experience that those today will have who work for God. Christians are tried, not only by the anger, contempt, and cruelty of enemies, but by the indolence, inconsistency, lukewarmness, and treachery of avowed friends and helpers. Derision and reproach are hurled at them. And the same enemy that leads to contempt, at a favorable opportunity uses more cruel and violent measures.

Satan takes advantage of every unconsecrated element for the accomplishment of his purposes. Among those who profess to be the supporters of God's cause there are those who unite with His enemies and thus lay His cause open to the attacks of His bitterest foes. Even some who desire the work of God to prosper will yet weaken the hands of His servants by hearing, reporting, and half believing the slanders, boasts, and menaces of His adversaries. Satan works with marvelous success through his agents, and all who yield to their influence are subject to a bewitching power that destroys the wisdom of the wise and the understanding of the prudent. But, like Nehemiah, God's people are neither to fear nor to despise their enemies. Putting their trust in God, they are to go steadily forward, doing His work with unselfishness, and committing to His providence the cause for which they stand.

Amidst great discouragement, Nehemiah made God his trust, his sure defense. And He who was the support of His servant then has been the dependence of His people in every

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age. In every crisis His people may confidently declare, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" Romans 8:31. However craftily the plots of Satan and his agents may be laid, God can detect them, and bring to nought all their counsels. The response of faith today will be the response made by Nehemiah, "Our God shall fight for us;" for God is in the work, and no man can prevent its ultimate success.



chapter 54

This chapter is based on Nehemiah 5.

A Rebuke Against Extortion

THE wall of Jerusalem had not yet been completed when Nehemiah's attention was called to the unhappy condition of the poorer classes of the people. In the unsettled state of the country, tillage had been to some extent neglected. Furthermore, because of the selfish course pursued by some who had returned to Judea, the Lord's blessing was not resting upon their land, and there was a scarcity of grain.

In order to obtain food for their families, the poor were obliged to buy on credit and at exorbitant prices. They were also compelled to raise money by borrowing on interest to pay the heavy taxes imposed upon them by the kings of Persia. To add to the distress of the poor, the more wealthy among the Jews had taken advantage of their necessities, thus enriching themselves.

The Lord had commanded Israel, through Moses, that every third year a tithe be raised for the benefit of the poor;

The poorer classes of Jerusalem, often oppressed by the selfish rich, brought their grievances to Nehemiah's notice.

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and a further provision had been made in the suspension of agricultural labor every seventh year, the land lying fallow, its spontaneous products being left to those in need. Faithfulness in devoting these offerings to the relief of the poor and to other benevolent uses would have tended to keep fresh before the people the truth of God's ownership of all, and their opportunity to be channels of blessing. It was Jehovah's purpose that the Israelites should have a training that would eradicate selfishness, and develop breadth and nobility of character.

God had also instructed through Moses: "If thou lend money to any of My people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as an usurer." "Thou shalt not lend upon usury to thy brother; usury of money, usury of victuals, usury of anything that is lent upon usury." Exodus 22:25; Deuteronomy 23:19. Again He had said, "If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: but thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth." "For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land." Deuteronomy 15:7, 8, 11.

At times following the return of the exiles from Babylon, the wealthy Jews had gone directly contrary to these commands. When the poor were obliged to borrow to pay tribute to the king, the wealthy had lent them money, but had exacted a high rate of interest. By taking mortgages on the

lands of the poor, they had gradually reduced the unfortunate debtors to the deepest poverty. Many had been forced to sell their sons and daughters into servitude; and there seemed no hope of improving their condition, no way to redeem either their children or their lands, no prospect before them but ever-increasing distress, with perpetual want and bondage. Yet they were of the same nation, children of the same covenant, as their more favored brethren.

At length the people presented their condition before Nehemiah. "Lo," they said, "we bring into bondage our sons and our daughters to be servants, and some of our daughters are brought into bondage already: neither is it in our power to redeem them; for other men have our lands and vineyards."

As Nehemiah heard of this cruel oppression, his soul was filled with indignation. "I was very angry," he says, "when I heard their cry and these words." He saw that if he succeeded in breaking up the oppressive custom of exaction he must take a decided stand for justice. With characteristic energy and determination he went to work to bring relief to his brethren.

The fact that the oppressors were men of wealth, whose support was greatly needed in the work of restoring the city, did not for a moment influence Nehemiah. He sharply rebuked the nobles and rulers, and when he had gathered a great assembly of the people he set before them the requirements of God touching the case.

He called their attention to events that had occurred in the reign of King Ahaz. He repeated the message which God had at that time sent to Israel to rebuke their cruelty and oppression. The children of Judah, because of their idolatry,

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had been delivered into the hands of their still more idolatrous brethren, the people of Israel. The latter had indulged their enmity by slaying in battle many thousands of the men of Judah and had seized all the women and children, intending to keep them as slaves or to sell them into bondage to the heathen.

Because of the sins of Judah, the Lord had not interposed to prevent the battle; but by the prophet Oded He rebuked the cruel design of the victorious army: "Ye purpose to keep under the children of Judah and Jerusalem for bondmen and bondwomen unto you: but are there not with you, even with you, sins against the Lord your God?" 2 Chronicles 28:10. Oded warned the people of Israel that the anger of the Lord was kindled against them, and that their course of injustice and oppression would call down His judgments. Upon hearing these words, the armed men left the captives and the spoil before the princes and all the congregation. Then certain leading men of the tribe of Ephraim "took the captives, and with the spoil clothed all that were naked among them, and arrayed them, and shod them, and gave them to eat and to drink, and anointed them, and carried all the feeble of them upon asses, and brought them to Jericho, the city of palm trees, to their brethren." Verse 15.

Nehemiah and others had ransomed certain of the Jews who had been sold to the heathen, and he now placed this course in contrast with the conduct of those who for the sake of worldly gain were enslaving their brethren. "It is not good that ye do," he said; "ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies?"

Nehemiah showed them that he himself, being invested

with authority from the Persian king, might have demanded large contributions for his personal benefit. But instead of this he had not taken even that which justly belonged to him, but had given liberally to relieve the poor in their need. He urged those among the Jewish rulers who had been guilty of extortion, to cease this iniquitous work; to restore the lands of the poor, and also the increase of money which they had exacted from them; and to lend to them without security or usury.

These words were spoken in the presence of the whole congregation. Had the rulers chosen to justify themselves, they had opportunity to do so. But they offered no excuse. "We will restore them," they declared, "and will require nothing of them; so will we do as thou sayest." At this, Nehemiah in the presence of the priests "took an oath of them, that they should do according to this promise." "And all the congregation said, Amen, and praised the Lord. And the people did according to this promise."

This record teaches an important lesson. "The love of money is the root of all evil." 1 Timothy 6:10. In this generation the desire for gain is the absorbing passion. Wealth is often obtained by fraud. There are multitudes struggling with poverty, compelled to labor hard for small wages, unable to secure even the barest necessities of life. Toil and deprivation, with no hope of better things, make their burden heavy. Careworn and oppressed, they know not where to turn for relief. And all this that the rich may support their extravagance or indulge their desire to hoard!

Love of money and love of display have made this world as a den of thieves and robbers. The Scriptures picture the

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greed and oppression that will prevail just before Christ's second coming. "Go to now, ye rich men," James writes; "ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. Behold, the hire of the laborers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter. Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you." James 5:1, 3-6.

Even among those who profess to be walking in the fear of the Lord, there are some who are acting over again the course pursued by the nobles of Israel. Because it is in their power to do so, they exact more than is just, and thus become oppressors. And because avarice and treachery are seen in the lives of those who have named the name of Christ, because the church retains on her books the names of those who have gained their possessions by injustice, the religion of Christ is held in contempt. Extravagance, overreaching, extortion, are corrupting the faith of many and destroying their spirituality. The church is in a great degree responsible for the sins of her members. She gives countenance to evil if she fails to lift her voice against it.

The customs of the world are no criterion for the Christian. He is not to imitate its sharp practices, its overreaching, its extortion. Every unjust act toward a fellow being is a violation of the golden rule. Every wrong done to the children of God is done to Christ Himself in the person of His saints. Every attempt to take advantage of the ignorance, weakness, or misfortune of another is registered as fraud in the ledger

of heaven. He who truly fears God, would rather toil day and night, and eat the bread of poverty, than to indulge the passion for gain that oppresses the widow and fatherless or turns the stranger from his right.

The slightest departure from rectitude breaks down the barriers and prepares the heart to do greater injustice. Just to that extent that a man would gain advantage for himself at the disadvantage of another, will his soul become insensible to the influence of the Spirit of God. Gain obtained at such a cost is a fearful loss.

We were all debtors to divine justice, but we had nothing with which to pay the debt. Then the Son of God, who pitied us, paid the price of our redemption. He became poor that through His poverty we might be rich. By deeds of liberality toward His poor we may prove the sincerity of our gratitude for the mercy extended to us. "Let us do good unto all men," the apostle Paul enjoins, "especially unto them who are of the household of faith." Galatians 6:10. And his words accord with those of the Saviour: "Ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good." "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets." Mark 14:7; Matthew 7:12.



chapter 55

This chapter is based on Nehemiah 6.

Heathen Plots

SANBALLAT and his confederates dared not make open war upon the Jews; but with increasing malice they continued their secret efforts to discourage, perplex, and injure them. The wall about Jerusalem was rapidly approaching completion. When it should be finished and its gates set up, these enemies of Israel could not hope to force an entrance into the city. They were the more eager, therefore, to stop the work without further delay. At last they devised a plan by which they hoped to draw Nehemiah from his station, and while they had him in their power, to kill or imprison him.

Pretending to desire a compromise of the opposing parties, they sought a conference with Nehemiah, and invited him to meet them in a village on the plain of Ono. But enlightened by the Holy Spirit as to their real purpose, he refused. "I sent messengers unto them," he writes, "saying, I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?" But

Failing in all other attempts to stop the work of restoration, the heathen plotted to take the life of Nehemiah.

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the tempters were persistent. Four times they sent a message of similar import, and each time they received the same answer.

Finding this scheme unsuccessful, they resorted to a more daring stratagem. Sanballat sent Nehemiah a messenger bearing an open letter which said: "It is reported among the heathen, and Gashmu saith it, that thou and the Jews think to rebel: for which cause thou buildest the wall, that thou mayest be their king. . . . And thou hast also appointed prophets to preach of thee at Jerusalem, saying, There is a king in Judah: and now shall it be reported to the king according to these words. Come now therefore, and let us take counsel together."

Had the reports mentioned been actually circulated, there would have been cause for apprehension; for they would soon have been carried to the king, whom a slight suspicion might provoke to the severest measures. But Nehemiah was convinced that the letter was wholly false, written to arouse his fears and draw him into a snare. This conclusion was strengthened by the fact that the letter was sent open, evidently that the people might read the contents, and become alarmed and intimidated.

He promptly returned the answer, "There are no such things done as thou sayest, but thou feignest them out of thine own heart." Nehemiah was not ignorant of Satan's devices. He knew that these attempts were made in order to weaken the hands of the builders and thus frustrate their efforts.

Again and again had Satan been defeated; and now, with deeper malice and cunning, he laid a still more subtle and

dangerous snare for the servant of God. Sanballat and his companions hired men who professed to be the friends of Nehemiah, to give him evil counsel as the word of the Lord. The chief one engaged in this iniquitous work was Shemaiah, a man previously held in good repute by Nehemiah. This man shut himself up in a chamber near the sanctuary as if fearing that his life was in danger. The temple was at this time protected by walls and gates, but the gates of the city were not yet set up. Professing great concern for Nehemiah's safety, Shemaiah advised him to seek shelter in the temple. "Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple," he proposed, "and let us shut the doors of the temple: for they will come to slay thee; yea, in the night will they come to slay thee."

Had Nehemiah followed this treacherous counsel, he would have sacrificed his faith in God, and in the eyes of the people he would have appeared cowardly and contemptible. In view of the important work that he had undertaken, and the confidence that he professed to have in the power of God, it would have been altogether inconsistent for him to hide as if in fear. The alarm would have spread among the people, each would have sought his own safety, and the city would have been left unprotected, to fall a prey to its enemies. That one unwise move on the part of Nehemiah would have been a virtual surrender of all that had been gained.

Nehemiah was not long in penetrating the true character and object of his counselor. "I perceived that God had not sent him," he says, "but that he pronounced this prophecy against me: for Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. Therefore was he hired, that I should be afraid, and do so, and sin,

and that they might have matter for an evil report, that they might reproach me."

The infamous counsel given by Shemaiah was seconded by more than one man of high reputation, who, while professing to be Nehemiah's friends, were secretly in league with his enemies. But it was to no avail that they laid their snare. Nehemiah's fearless answer was: "Should such a man as I flee? and who is there, that, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in."

Notwithstanding the plots of enemies, open and secret, the work of building went steadily forward, and in less than two months from the time of Nehemiah's arrival in Jerusalem the city was girded with its defenses and the builders could walk upon the walls and look down upon their defeated and astonished foes. "When all our enemies heard thereof, and all the heathen that were about us saw these things," Nehemiah writes, "they were much cast down in their own eyes: for they perceived that this work was wrought of our God."

Yet even this evidence of the Lord's controlling hand was not sufficient to restrain discontent, rebellion, and treachery among the Israelites. "The nobles of Judah sent many letters unto Tobiah, and the letters of Tobiah came unto them. For there were many in Judah sworn unto him, because he was the son-in-law of Shechaniah." Here are seen the evil results of intermarriage with idolaters. A family of Judah had become connected with the enemies of God, and the relation had proved a snare. Many others had done the same. These, like the mixed multitude that came up with Israel from Egypt, were a source of constant trouble. They were not whole-hearted in His service; and when God's work demanded a

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sacrifice, they were ready to violate their solemn oath of co-operation and support.

Some who had been foremost in plotting mischief against the Jews, now professed a desire to be on friendly terms with them. The nobles of Judah who had become entangled in idolatrous marriages, and who had held traitorous correspondence with Tobiah and taken oath to serve him, now represented him as a man of ability and foresight, an alliance with whom would be greatly to the advantage of the Jews. At the same time they betrayed to him Nehemiah's plans and movements. Thus the work of God's people was laid open to the attacks of their enemies, and opportunity was given to misconstrue Nehemiah's words and acts, and to hinder his work.

When the poor and oppressed had appealed to Nehemiah for redress of their wrongs, he had stood boldly in their defense and had caused the wrongdoers to remove the reproach that rested on them. But the authority that he had exercised



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in behalf of his downtrodden countrymen he did not now exercise in his own behalf. His efforts had been met by some with ingratitude and treachery, but he did not use his power to bring the traitors to punishment. Calmly and unselfishly he went forward in his service for the people, never slackening his efforts or allowing his interest to grow less.

Satan's assaults have ever been directed against those who have sought to advance the work and cause of God. Though often baffled, he as often renews his attacks with fresh vigor, using means hitherto untried. But it is his secret working through those who avow themselves the friends of God's work, that is most to be feared. Open opposition may be fierce and cruel, but it is fraught with far less peril to God's cause than is the secret enmity of those who, while professing to serve God, are at heart the servants of Satan. These have it in their power to place every advantage in the hands of those who will use their knowledge to hinder the work of God and injure His servants.

Every device that the prince of darkness can suggest will be employed to induce God's servants to form a confederacy with the agents of Satan. Repeated solicitations will come to call them from duty; but, like Nehemiah, they should steadfastly reply, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down." God's workers may safely keep on with their work, letting their efforts refute the falsehoods that malice may coin for their injury. Like the builders on the walls of Jerusalem they must refuse to be diverted from their work by threats or mockery or falsehood. Not for one moment are they to relax their watchfulness or vigilance, for enemies are continually on their track. Ever they must make their prayer to

God "and set a watch against them day and night." Nehemiah 4:9.

As the time of the end draws near, Satan's temptations will be brought to bear with greater power upon God's workers. He will employ human agents to mock and revile those who "build the wall." But should the builders come down to meet the attacks of their foes, this would but retard the work. They should endeavor to defeat the purposes of their adversaries, but they should not allow anything to call them from their work. Truth is stronger than error, and right will prevail over wrong.

Neither should they allow their enemies to gain their friendship and sympathy, and thus lure them from their post of duty. He who by any unguarded act exposes the cause of God to reproach, or weakens the hands of his fellow workers, brings upon his own character a stain not easily removed, and places a serious obstacle in the way of his future usefulness.

"They that forsake the law praise the wicked." Proverbs 28:4. When those who are uniting with the world, yet claiming great purity, plead for union with those who have ever been the opposers of the cause of truth, we should fear and shun them as decidedly as did Nehemiah. Such counsel is prompted by the enemy of all good. It is the speech of time-servers, and should be resisted as resolutely today as then. Whatever influence would tend to unsettle the faith of God's people in His guiding power, should be steadfastly withstood.

In Nehemiah's firm devotion to the work of God, and his equally firm reliance on God, lay the reason of the failure of his enemies to draw him into their power. The soul that is indolent falls an easy prey to temptation; but in the life

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that has a noble aim, an absorbing purpose, evil finds little foothold. The faith of him who is constantly advancing does not weaken; for above, beneath, beyond, he recognizes Infinite Love, working out all things to accomplish His good purpose. God's true servants work with a determination that will not fail because the throne of grace is their constant dependence.

God has provided divine assistance for all the emergencies to which our human resources are unequal. He gives the Holy Spirit to help in every strait, to strengthen our hope and assurance, to illuminate our minds and purify our hearts. He provides opportunities and opens channels of working. If His people are watching the indications of His providence, and are ready to co-operate with Him, they will see mighty results.

chapter 56

This chapter is based on Nehemiah 8:9; and 10.

Instructed in the Law of God

IT WAS the time of the Feast of Trumpets.

Many were gathered at Jerusalem. The scene was one of mournful interest. The wall of Jerusalem had been rebuilt and the gates set up, but a large part of the city was still in ruins.

On a platform of wood, erected in one of the broadest streets, and surrounded on every hand by the sad reminders of Judah's departed glory, stood Ezra, now an aged man. At his right and left were gathered his brother Levites. Looking down from the platform, their eyes swept over a sea of heads. From all the surrounding country the children of the covenant had assembled. "And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen: . . . and they bowed their heads, and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground."

Yet even here was evidence of the sin of Israel. Through the intermarriage of the people with other nations, the Hebrew language had become corrupted, and great care was

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necessary on the part of the speakers to explain the law in the language of the people, that it might be understood by all. Certain of the priests and Levites united with Ezra in explaining the principles of the law. "They read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading."

"And the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law." They listened, intent and reverent, to the words of the Most High. As the law was explained, they were convinced of their guilt, and they mourned because of their transgressions. But this day was a festival, a day of rejoicing, a holy convocation, a day which the Lord had commanded the people to keep with joy and gladness; and in view of this they were bidden to restrain their grief and to rejoice because of God's great mercy toward them. "This day is holy unto the Lord your God," Nehemiah said. "Mourn not, nor weep. . . . Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength."

The earlier part of the day was devoted to religious exercises, and the people spent the remainder of the time in gratefully recounting the blessings of God and in enjoying the bounties that He had provided. Portions were also sent to the poor, who had nothing to prepare. There was great rejoicing because the words of the law had been read and understood.

On the following day the reading and explaining of the law were continued. And at the time appointed—on the tenth day of the seventh month—the solemn services of the Day

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of Atonement were performed according to the command of God.

From the fifteenth to the twenty-second of the same month the people and their rulers kept once more the Feast of Tabernacles. It was proclaimed "in all their cities, and in Jerusalem, saying, Go forth unto the mount, and fetch olive branches, and pine branches, and myrtle branches, and palm branches, and branches of thick trees, to make booths, as it is written. So the people went forth, and brought them, and made themselves booths, everyone upon the roof of his house, and in their courts, and in the courts of the house of God. . . . And there was very great gladness. Also day by day, from the first day unto the last day, he [Ezra] read in the book of the law of God."



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As they had listened from day to day to the words of the law, the people had been convicted of their transgressions, and of the sins of their nation in past generations. They saw that it was because of a departure from God that His protecting care had been withdrawn and that the children of Abraham had been scattered in foreign lands, and they determined to seek His mercy and to pledge themselves to walk in His commandments. Before entering upon this solemn service, held on the second day after the close of the Feast of Tabernacles, they separated themselves from the heathen among them.

As the people prostrated themselves before the Lord, confessing their sins and pleading for pardon, their leaders encouraged them to believe that God, according to His promise, heard their prayers. They must not only mourn and weep, and repent, but they must believe that God pardoned them. They must show their faith by recounting His mercies and praising Him for His goodness. "Stand up," said these teachers, "and bless the Lord your God for ever and ever."

Then from the assembled throng, as they stood with outstretched hands toward heaven, there arose the song:

"Blessed be Thy glorious name,
Which is exalted above all blessing and praise.
Thou, even Thou, art Lord alone;
Thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens,
with all their host,
The earth, and all things that are therein,
The seas, and all that is therein,
And Thou preservest them all;
And the host of heaven worshipeth Thee."

The song of praise ended, the leaders of the congregation

related the history of Israel, showing how great had been God's goodness toward them, and how great their ingratitude. Then the whole congregation entered into a covenant to keep all the commandments of God. They had suffered punishment for their sins; now they acknowledged the justice of God's dealings with them and pledged themselves to obey His law. And that this might be "a sure covenant," and be preserved in permanent form, as a memorial of the obligation they had taken upon themselves, it was written out, and the priests, Levites, and princes signed it. It was to serve as a reminder of duty and a barrier against temptation. The people took a solemn oath "to walk in God's law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our Lord, and His judgments and His statutes." The oath taken at this time included a promise not to intermarry with the people of the land.

Before the day of fasting ended, the people still further manifested their determination to return to the Lord, by pledging themselves to cease from desecrating the Sabbath. Nehemiah did not at this time, as at a later date, exercise his authority to prevent heathen traders from coming into Jerusalem; but in an effort to save the people from yielding to temptation, he bound them, by a solemn covenant, not to transgress the Sabbath law by purchasing from these venders, hoping that this would discourage the traders and put an end to the traffic.

Provision was also made to support the public worship of God. In addition to the tithe the congregation pledged themselves to contribute yearly a stated sum for the service of the sanctuary. "We cast the lots," Nehemiah writes, "to bring

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the first fruits of our ground, and the first fruits of all fruit of all trees, year by year, unto the house of the Lord: also the first-born of our sons, and of our cattle, as it is written in the law, and the firstlings of our herds and of our flocks.”

Israel had returned to God with deep sorrow for backsliding. They had made confession with mourning and lamentation. They had acknowledged the righteousness of God’s dealings with them, and had covenanted to obey His law. Now they must manifest faith in His promises. God had accepted their repentance; they were now to rejoice in the assurance of sins forgiven and their restoration to divine favor.

Nehemiah’s efforts to restore the worship of the true God had been crowned with success. As long as the people were true to the oath they had taken, as long as they were obedient to God’s word, so long would the Lord fulfill His promise by pouring rich blessings upon them.

For those who are convicted of sin and weighed down with a sense of their unworthiness, there are lessons of faith and encouragement in this record. The Bible faithfully presents the result of Israel’s apostasy; but it portrays also the deep humiliation and repentance, the earnest devotion and generous sacrifice, that marked their seasons of return to the Lord.

Every true turning to the Lord brings abiding joy into the life. When a sinner yields to the influence of the Holy Spirit, he sees his own guilt and defilement in contrast with the holiness of the great Searcher of hearts. He sees himself condemned as a transgressor. But he is not, because of this, to give way to despair; for his pardon has already been secured.

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He may rejoice in the sense of sins forgiven, in the love of a pardoning heavenly Father. It is God's glory to encircle sinful, repentant human beings in the arms of His love, to bind up their wounds, to cleanse them from sin, and to clothe them with the garments of salvation.



chapter 57

This chapter is based on Nehemiah 13.

Reformation

SOLEMNLY and publicly the people of Judah had pledged themselves to obey the law of God. But when the influence of Ezra and Nehemiah was for a time withdrawn, there were many who departed from the Lord. Nehemiah had returned to Persia. During his absence from Jerusalem, evils crept in that threatened to pervert the nation. Idolaters not only gained a foothold in the city, but contaminated by their presence the very precincts of the temple. Through intermarriage, a friendship had been brought about between Eliashib the high priest and Tobiah the Ammonite, Israel's bitter enemy. As a result of this unhallowed alliance, Eliashib had permitted Tobiah to occupy an apartment connected with the temple, which heretofore had been used as a storeroom for tithes and offerings of the people.

Because of the cruelty and treachery of the Ammonites and Moabites toward Israel, God had declared through Moses

Nehemiah ordered the merchants selling their wares by the city gates to close their marketplace during the Sabbath.

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that they should be forever shut out from the congregation of His people. See Deuteronomy 23:3-6. In defiance of this word, the high priest had cast out the offerings stored in the chamber of God's house, to make a place for this representative of a proscribed race. Greater contempt for God could not have been shown than to confer such a favor on this enemy of God and His truth.

On returning from Persia, Nehemiah learned of the bold profanation and took prompt measures to expel the intruder. "It grieved me sore," he declares; "therefore I cast forth all the household stuff of Tobiah out of the chamber. Then I commanded, and they cleansed the chambers: and thither brought I again the vessels of the house of God, with the meat offering and the frankincense."

Not only had the temple been profaned, but the offerings had been misapplied. This had tended to discourage the liberalities of the people. They had lost their zeal and fervor, and were reluctant to pay their tithes. The treasuries of the Lord's house were poorly supplied; many of the singers and others employed in the temple service, not receiving sufficient support, had left the work of God to labor elsewhere.

Nehemiah set to work to correct these abuses. He gathered together those who had left the service of the Lord's house, "and set them in their place." This inspired the people with confidence, and all Judah brought "the tithe of the corn and the new wine and the oil." Men who "were counted faithful" were made "treasurers over the treasuries," "and their office was to distribute unto their brethren."

Another result of intercourse with idolaters was a disregard of the Sabbath, the sign distinguishing the Israelites

from all other nations as worshipers of the true God. Nehemiah found that heathen merchants and traders from the surrounding country, coming to Jerusalem, had induced many among the Israelites to engage in traffic on the Sabbath. There were some who could not be persuaded to sacrifice principle, but others transgressed and joined with the heathen in their efforts to overcome the scruples of the more conscientious. Many dared openly to violate the Sabbath. "In those days," Nehemiah writes, "saw I in Judah some treading wine presses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and lading asses; as also wine, grapes, and figs, and all manner of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. . . . There dwelt men of Tyre also therein, which brought fish, and all manner of ware, and sold on the Sabbath unto the children of Judah."

This state of things might have been prevented had the rulers exercised their authority; but a desire to advance their own interests had led them to favor the ungodly. Nehemiah fearlessly rebuked them for their neglect of duty. "What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the Sabbath day?" he sternly demanded. "Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city? yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the Sabbath." He then gave command that "when the gates of Jerusalem began to be dark before the Sabbath," they should be shut, and not opened again till the Sabbath was past; and having more confidence in his own servants than in those that the magistrates of Jerusalem might appoint, he stationed them at the gates to see that his orders were enforced.

Not inclined to abandon their purpose, "the merchants

and sellers of all kind of ware lodged without Jerusalem once or twice," hoping to find opportunity for traffic, with either the citizens or the country people. Nehemiah warned them that they would be punished if they continued this practice. "Why lodge ye about the wall?" he demanded; "if ye do so again, I will lay hands on you." "From that time forth came they no more on the Sabbath." He also directed the Levites to guard the gates, knowing that they would command greater respect than the common people, while from their close connection with the service of God it was reasonable to expect that they would be more zealous in enforcing obedience to His law.

And now Nehemiah turned his attention to the danger that again threatened Israel from intermarriage and association with idolaters. "In those days," he writes, "saw I Jews that had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab: and their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews' language, but according to the language of each people."

These unlawful alliances were causing great confusion in Israel; for some who entered into them were men in high position, rulers to whom the people had a right to look for counsel and a safe example. Foreseeing the ruin before the nation if this evil were allowed to continue, Nehemiah reasoned earnestly with the wrongdoers. Pointing to the case of Solomon, he reminded them that among all the nations there had risen no king like this man, to whom God had given great wisdom; yet idolatrous women had turned his heart from God, and his example had corrupted Israel. "Shall we then hearken unto you," Nehemiah sternly demanded, "to

do all this great evil?" "Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons, or for yourselves."

As he set before them God's commands and threatenings, and the fearful judgments visited on Israel in the past for this very sin, their consciences were aroused, and a work of reformation was begun that turned away God's threatened anger and brought His approval and blessing.

There were some in sacred office who pleaded for their heathen wives, declaring that they could not bring themselves to separate from them. But no distinction was made; no respect was shown for rank or position. Whoever among the priests or rulers refused to sever his connection with idolaters was immediately separated from the service of the Lord. A grandson of the high priest, having married a daughter of the notorious Sanballat, was not only removed from



office but promptly banished from Israel. "Remember them, O my God," Nehemiah prayed, "because they have defiled the priesthood, and the covenant of the priesthood, and of the Levites."

How much anguish of soul this needed severity cost the faithful worker for God the judgment alone will reveal. There was a constant struggle with opposing elements, and only by fasting, humiliation, and prayer was advancement made.

Many who had married idolaters chose to go with them into exile, and these, with those who had been expelled from the congregation, joined the Samaritans. Hither some who had occupied high positions in the work of God found their way and after a time cast in their lot fully with them. Desiring to strengthen this alliance, the Samaritans promised to adopt more fully the Jewish faith and customs, and the apostates, determined to outdo their former brethren, erected a temple on Mount Gerizim in opposition to the house of God at Jerusalem. Their religion continued to be a mixture of Judaism and heathenism, and their claim to be the people of God was the source of schism, emulation, and enmity between the two nations, from generation to generation.

In the work of reform to be carried forward today, there is need of men who, like Ezra and Nehemiah, will not palliate or excuse sin, nor shrink from vindicating the honor of God. Those upon whom rests the burden of this work will not hold their peace when wrong is done, neither will they cover evil with a cloak of false charity. They will remember that God is no respecter of persons, and that severity to a few may prove mercy to many. They will remember also that in the one who rebukes evil the spirit of Christ should ever be revealed.

In their work, Ezra and Nehemiah humbled themselves before God, confessing their sins and the sins of their people, and entreating pardon as if they themselves were the offenders. Patiently they toiled and prayed and suffered. That which made their work most difficult was not the open hostility of the heathen, but the secret opposition of pretended friends, who, by lending their influence to the service of evil, increased tenfold the burden of God's servants. These traitors furnished the Lord's enemies with material to use in their warfare upon His people. Their evil passions and rebellious wills were ever at war with the plain requirements of God.

The success attending Nehemiah's efforts shows what prayer, faith, and wise, energetic action will accomplish. Nehemiah was not a priest; he was not a prophet; he made no pretension to high title. He was a reformer raised up for an important time. It was his aim to set his people right with God. Inspired with a great purpose, he bent every energy of his being to its accomplishment. High, unbending integrity marked his efforts. As he came into contact with evil and opposition to right he took so determined a stand that the people were roused to labor with fresh zeal and courage. They could not but recognize his loyalty, his patriotism, and his deep love for God; and, seeing this, they were willing to follow where he led.

Industry in a God-appointed duty is an important part of true religion. Men should seize circumstances as God's instruments with which to work His will. Prompt and decisive action at the right time will gain glorious triumphs, while delay and neglect result in failure and dishonor to God. If the leaders in the cause of truth show no zeal, if they are

indifferent and purposeless, the church will be careless, indolent, and pleasure-loving; but if they are filled with a holy purpose to serve God and Him alone, the people will be united, hopeful, eager.

The word of God abounds in sharp and striking contrasts. Sin and holiness are placed side by side, that, beholding, we may shun the one and accept the other. The pages that describe the hatred, falsehood, and treachery of Sanballat and Tobiah, describe also the nobility, devotion, and self-sacrifice of Ezra and Nehemiah. We are left free to copy either, as we choose. The fearful results of transgressing God's commands are placed over against the blessings resulting from obedience. We ourselves must decide whether we will suffer the one or enjoy the other.

The work of restoration and reform carried on by the returned exiles, under the leadership of Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, presents a picture of a work of spiritual restoration that is to be wrought in the closing days of this earth's history. The remnant of Israel were a feeble people, exposed to the ravages of their enemies; but through them God purposed to preserve in the earth a knowledge of Himself and of His law. They were the guardians of the true worship, the keepers of the holy oracles. Varied were the experiences that came to them as they rebuilt the temple and the wall of Jerusalem; strong was the opposition that they had to meet. Heavy were the burdens borne by the leaders in this work; but these men moved forward in unwavering confidence, in humility of spirit, and in firm reliance upon God, believing that He would cause His truth to triumph. Like King Hezekiah, Nehemiah "clave to the Lord, and departed not from following

Him, but kept His commandments. . . . And the Lord was with him." 2 Kings 18:6, 7.

The spiritual restoration of which the work carried forward in Nehemiah's day was a symbol, is outlined in the words of Isaiah: "They shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities." "They that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in." Isaiah 61:4; 58:12.

The prophet here describes a people who, in a time of general departure from truth and righteousness, are seeking to restore the principles that are the foundation of the kingdom of God. They are repairers of a breach that has been made in God's law—the wall that He has placed around His chosen ones for their protection, and obedience to whose precepts of justice, truth, and purity is to be their perpetual safeguard.

In words of unmistakable meaning the prophet points out the specific work of this remnant people who build the wall. "If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on My holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honorable; and shalt honor Him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." Isaiah 58:13, 14.

In the time of the end every divine institution is to be

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restored. The breach made in the law at the time the Sabbath was changed by man, is to be repaired. God's remnant people, standing before the world as reformers, are to show that the law of God is the foundation of all enduring reform and that the Sabbath of the fourth commandment is to stand as a memorial of creation, a constant reminder of the power of God. In clear, distinct lines they are to present the necessity of obedience to all the precepts of the Decalogue. Constrained by the love of Christ, they are to co-operate with Him in building up the waste places. They are to be repairers of the breach, restorers of paths to dwell in. See verse 12.

The Coming of a Deliverer

THROUGH the long centuries of “trouble and darkness” and “dimness of anguish” (Isaiah 8:22) marking the history of mankind from the day our first parents lost their Eden home, to the time the Son of God appeared as the Saviour of sinners, the hope of the fallen race was centered in the coming of a Deliverer to free men and women from the bondage of sin and the grave.

The first intimation of such a hope was given to Adam and Eve in the sentence pronounced upon the serpent in Eden when the Lord declared to Satan in their hearing, “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” Genesis 3:15.

As the guilty pair listened to these words, they were inspired with hope; for in the prophecy concerning the breaking of Satan’s power they discerned a promise of deliverance from the ruin wrought through transgression. Though they must suffer from the power of their adversary because they had

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fallen under his seductive influence and had chosen to disobey the plain command of Jehovah, yet they need not yield to utter despair. The Son of God was offering to atone with His own lifeblood for their transgression. To them was to be granted a period of probation, during which, through faith in the power of Christ to save, they might become once more the children of God.

Satan, by means of his success in turning man aside from the path of obedience, became “the god of this world.” 2 Corinthians 4:4. The dominion that once was Adam’s passed to the usurper. But the Son of God proposed to come to this earth to pay the penalty of sin, and thus not only redeem man, but recover the dominion forfeited. It is of this restoration that Micah prophesied when he said, “O Tower of the flock, the stronghold of the daughter of Zion, unto Thee shall it come, even the first dominion.” Micah 4:8. The apostle Paul has referred to it as “the redemption of the purchased possession.” Ephesians 1:14. And the psalmist had in mind the same final restoration of man’s original inheritance when he declared, “The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein forever.” Psalm 37:29.

This hope of redemption through the advent of the Son of God as Saviour and King, has never become extinct in the hearts of men. From the beginning there have been some whose faith has reached out beyond the shadows of the present to the realities of the future. Adam, Seth, Enoch, Methuselah, Noah, Shem, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—through these and other worthies the Lord has preserved the precious revealings of His will. And it was thus that to the children of Israel, the chosen people through whom was to be given to the world



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the promised Messiah, God imparted a knowledge of the requirements of His law, and of the salvation to be accomplished through the atoning sacrifice of His beloved Son.

The hope of Israel was embodied in the promise made at the time of the call of Abraham, and afterward repeated again and again to his posterity, "In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." Genesis 12:3. As the purpose of God for the redemption of the race was unfolded to Abraham, the Sun of Righteousness shone upon his heart, and his darkness was scattered. And when, at last, the Saviour Himself walked and talked among the sons of men, He bore witness to the Jews of the patriarch's bright hope of deliverance through the coming of a Redeemer. "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day," Christ declared; "and he saw it, and was glad." John 8:56.

This same blessed hope was foreshadowed in the benediction pronounced by the dying patriarch Jacob upon his son Judah:

"Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise:
Thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies;
Thy father's children shall bow down before thee. . . .
The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
Nor a lawgiver from between his feet,
Until Shiloh come;
And unto Him shall the gathering of the people be."
Genesis 49:8-10.

Again, on the borders of the Promised Land, the coming of the world's Redeemer was foretold in the prophecy uttered by Balaam:

"I shall see Him, but not now: I shall behold Him, but
not nigh:

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There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Scepter
shall rise out of Israel,
And shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all
the children of Sheth."

Numbers 24:17.

Through Moses, God's purpose to send His Son as the Redeemer of the fallen race, was kept before Israel. On one occasion, shortly before his death, Moses declared, "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto Him ye shall hearken." Plainly had Moses been instructed for Israel concerning the work of the Messiah to come. "I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee," was the word of Jehovah to His servant; "and will put My words in His mouth; and He shall speak unto them all that I shall command Him." Deuteronomy 18:15, 18.

In patriarchal times the sacrificial offerings connected with divine worship constituted a perpetual reminder of the coming of a Saviour, and thus it was with the entire ritual of the sanctuary services throughout Israel's history. In the ministration of the tabernacle, and of the temple that afterward took its place, the people were taught each day, by means of types and shadows, the great truths relative to the advent of Christ as Redeemer, Priest, and King; and once each year their minds were carried forward to the closing events of the great controversy between Christ and Satan, the final purification of the universe from sin and sinners. The sacrifices and offerings of the Mosaic ritual were ever pointing toward a better service, even a heavenly. The earthly sanctuary was "a figure for the time then present," in which were offered both gifts

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and sacrifices; its two holy places were “patterns of things in the heavens;” for Christ, our great High Priest, is today “a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man.” Hebrews 9:9, 23; 8:2.

From the day the Lord declared to the serpent in Eden, “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed” (Genesis 3:15), Satan has known that he can never hold absolute sway over the inhabitants of this world. When Adam and his sons began to offer the ceremonial sacrifices ordained by God as a type of the coming Redeemer, Satan discerned in these a symbol of communion between earth and heaven. During the long centuries that have followed, it has been his constant effort to intercept this communion. Untiringly has he sought to misrepresent God and to misinterpret the rites pointing to the Saviour, and with a great majority of the members of the human family he has been successful.

While God has desired to teach men that from His own love comes the Gift which reconciles them to Himself, the archenemy of mankind has endeavored to represent God as one who delights in their destruction. Thus the sacrifices and the ordinances designed of Heaven to reveal divine love have been perverted to serve as means whereby sinners have vainly hoped to propitiate, with gifts and good works, the wrath of an offended God. At the same time, Satan has sought to arouse and strengthen the evil passions of men in order that through repeated transgression multitudes might be led on and on, far from God, and hopelessly bound with the fetters of sin.

When God’s written word was given through the Hebrew prophets, Satan studied with diligence the messages concern-

ing the Messiah. Carefully he traced the words that outlined with unmistakable clearness Christ's work among men as a suffering sacrifice and as a conquering king. In the parchment rolls of the Old Testament Scriptures he read that the One who was to appear was to be "brought as a lamb to the slaughter," "His visage . . . so marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men." Isaiah 53:7; 52:14. The promised Saviour of humanity was to be "despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; . . . smitten of God, and afflicted;" yet He was also to exercise His mighty power in order to "judge the poor of the people." He was to "save the children of the needy," and "break in pieces the oppressor." Isaiah 53:3, 4; Psalm 72:4. These prophecies caused Satan to fear and tremble; yet he relinquished not his purpose to thwart, if possible, the merciful provisions of Jehovah for the redemption of the lost race. He determined to blind the eyes of the people, so far as might be possible, to the real significance of the Messianic prophecies, in order to prepare the way for the rejection of Christ at His coming.

During the centuries immediately preceding the Flood, success had attended Satan's efforts to bring about a world-wide prevalence of rebellion against God. And even the lessons of the Deluge were not long held in remembrance. With artful insinuations Satan again led the children of men step by step into bold rebellion. Again he seemed about to triumph, but God's purpose for fallen man was not thus to be set aside. Through the posterity of faithful Abraham, of the line of Shem, a knowledge of Jehovah's beneficent designs was to be preserved for the benefit of future generations. From time to

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time divinely appointed messengers of truth were to be raised up to call attention to the meaning of the sacrificial ceremonies, and especially to the promise of Jehovah concerning the advent of the One toward whom all the ordinances of the sacrificial system pointed. Thus the world was to be kept from universal apostasy.

Not without the most determined opposition was the divine purpose carried out. In every way possible the enemy of truth and righteousness worked to cause the descendants of Abraham to forget their high and holy calling, and to turn aside to the worship of false gods. And often his efforts were all but successful. For centuries preceding Christ's first advent, darkness covered the earth, and gross darkness the people. Satan was throwing his hellish shadow athwart the pathway of men, that he might prevent them from gaining a knowledge of God and of the future world. Multitudes were sitting in the shadow of death. Their only hope was for this gloom to be lifted, that God might be revealed.

With prophetic vision David, the anointed of God, had foreseen that the coming of Christ should be "as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds." 2 Samuel 23:4. And Hosea testified, "His going forth is prepared as the morning." Hosea 6:3. Quietly and gently the daylight breaks upon the earth, dispelling the shadow of darkness and waking the earth to life. So was the Sun of Righteousness to arise, "with healing in His wings." Malachi 4:2. The multitudes dwelling "in the land of the shadow of death" were to see "a great light." Isaiah 9:2.

The prophet Isaiah, looking with rapture upon this glorious deliverance, exclaimed:

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“Unto us a Child is born,
Unto us a Son is given:
And the government shall be upon His shoulder:
And His name shall be called
Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God,
The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of His government and peace
there shall be no end,
Upon the throne of David,
And upon His kingdom,
To order it, and to establish it
With judgment and with justice
From henceforth even forever.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.”

Verses 6, 7.

In the later centuries of Israel's history prior to the first advent it was generally understood that the coming of the Messiah was referred to in the prophecy, “It is a light thing that Thou shouldest be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give Thee for a light to the Gentiles, that Thou mayest be My salvation unto the end of the earth.” “The glory of the Lord shall be revealed,” the prophet had foretold, “and all flesh shall see it together.” Isaiah 49:6; 40:5. It was of this light of men that John the Baptist afterward testified so boldly, when he proclaimed, “I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias.” John 1:23.

It was to Christ that the prophetic promise was given: “Thus saith the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, and His Holy One, to Him whom man despiseth, to Him whom the nation abhorreth, . . . thus saith the Lord, . . . I will preserve Thee,

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and give Thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages; that Thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Show yourselves. . . . They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for He that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall He guide them." Isaiah 49:7-10.

The steadfast among the Jewish nation, descendants of that holy line through whom a knowledge of God had been preserved, strengthened their faith by dwelling on these and similar passages. With exceeding joy they read how the Lord would anoint One "to preach good tidings unto the meek," "to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives," and to declare "the acceptable year of the Lord." Isaiah 61:1, 2. Yet their hearts were filled with sadness as they thought of the sufferings He must endure in order to fulfill the divine purpose. With deep humiliation of soul they traced the words in the prophetic roll:

"Who hath believed our report?
And to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?
"For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant,
And as a root out of a dry ground:
He hath no form nor comeliness;
And when we shall see Him,
There is no beauty that we should desire Him.
"He is despised and rejected of men;
A Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with grief:
And we hid as it were our faces from Him;
He was despised, and we esteemed Him not.
"Surely He hath borne our griefs,
And carried our sorrows:

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Yet we did esteem Him stricken,
Smitten of God, and afflicted.

“But He was wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities:
The chastisement of our peace was upon Him;
And with His stripes we are healed.

“All we like sheep have gone astray;
We have turned everyone to his own way;
And the Lord hath laid on Him
The iniquity of us all.

“He was oppressed, and He was afflicted,
Yet He opened not His mouth:
He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter,
And as a sheep before her shearers is dumb,
So He openeth not His mouth.

“He was taken from prison and from judgment:
And who shall declare His generation?
For He was cut off out of the land of the living:
For the transgression of My people was He stricken.

“And He made His grave with the wicked,
And with the rich in His death;
Because He had done no violence,
Neither was any deceit in His mouth.”

Isaiah 53:1-9.

Of the suffering Saviour Jehovah Himself declared through Zechariah, “Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, and against the Man that is My Fellow.” Zechariah 13:7. As the substitute and surety for sinful man, Christ was to suffer under divine justice. He was to understand what justice meant. He was to know what it means for sinners to stand before God without an intercessor.

Through the psalmist the Redeemer had prophesied of Himself:

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“Reproach hath broken My heart;
And I am full of heaviness:
And I looked for some to take pity,
But there was none;
And for comforters,
But I found none.
They gave Me also gall for My meat;
And in My thirst they gave Me vinegar to drink.”

Psalm 69:20, 21.

Of the treatment He was to receive, He prophesied, “Dogs have compassed Me: the assembly of the wicked have enclosed Me: they pierced My hands and My feet. I may tell all My bones: they look and stare upon Me. They part My garments among them, and cast lots upon My vesture.” Psalm 22:16-18.

These portrayals of the bitter suffering and cruel death of the Promised One, sad though they were, were rich in promise; for of Him whom “it pleased the Lord to bruise” and to put to grief, in order that He might become “an offering for sin,” Jehovah declared:

“He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days,
And the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand.
He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied:

“By His knowledge shall My righteous Servant justify many;
For He shall bear their iniquities.

Therefore will I divide Him a portion with the great,
And He shall divide the spoil with the strong;

Because He hath poured out His soul unto death:
And He was numbered with the transgressors;
And He bare the sin of many,
And made intercession for the transgressors.”

Isaiah 53:10-12.

It was love for sinners that led Christ to pay the price of redemption. "He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor;" none other could ransom men and women from the power of the enemy; "therefore His arm brought salvation unto him; and His righteousness, it sustained him." Isaiah 59:16.

"Behold My Servant, whom I uphold;
Mine Elect, in whom My soul delighteth;
I have put My Spirit upon Him:
He shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles."

Isaiah 42:1.

In His life no self-assertion was to be mingled. The homage which the world gives to position, to wealth, and to talent, was to be foreign to the Son of God. None of the means that men employ to win allegiance or to command homage, was the Messiah to use. His utter renunciation of self was foreshadowed in the words:

"He shall not cry,
Nor lift up,
Nor cause His voice to be heard in the street.
A bruised reed shall He not break,
And the smoking flax shall He not quench."

Verses 2, 3.

In marked contrast to the teachers of His day was the Saviour to conduct Himself among men. In His life no noisy disputation, no ostentatious worship, no act to gain applause, was ever to be witnessed. The Messiah was to be hid in God, and God was to be revealed in the character of His Son. Without a knowledge of God, humanity would be eternally lost. Without divine help, men and women would sink lower and

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lower. Life and power must be imparted by Him who made the world. Man's necessities could be met in no other way.

It was further prophesied of the Messiah: "He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till He have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for His law." The Son of God was to "magnify the law, and make it honorable." Verses 4, 21. He was not to lessen its importance and binding claims; He was rather to exalt it. At the same time He was to free the divine precepts from those burdensome exactions placed upon them by man, whereby many were brought to discouragement in their efforts to serve God acceptably.

Of the mission of the Saviour the word of Jehovah was: "I the Lord have called Thee in righteousness, and will hold Thine hand, and will keep Thee, and give Thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house. I am the Lord: that is My name: and My glory will I not give to another, neither My praise to graven images. Behold, the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare: before they spring forth I tell you of them." Verses 6-9.

Through the promised Seed, the God of Israel was to bring deliverance to Zion. "There shall come forth a Rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots." "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel. Butter and honey shall He eat, that He may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good." Isaiah 11:1; 7:14, 15.

"And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might,

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the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord; and shall make Him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord: and He shall not judge after the sight of His eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of His ears: but with righteousness shall He judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and He shall smite the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips shall He slay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of His loins, and faithfulness the girdle of His reins." "And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and His rest shall be glorious." Isaiah 11:2-5, 10.

"Behold the Man whose name is the Branch; . . . He shall build the temple of the Lord; and He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon His throne; and He shall be a priest upon His throne." Zechariah 6:12, 13.

A fountain was to be opened "for sin and for uncleanness" (Zechariah 13:1); the sons of men were to hear the blessed invitation:

"Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters,
And he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat;
Yea, come, buy wine and milk
Without money and without price.

"Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread?
And your labor for that which satisfieth not?
Hearken diligently unto Me, and eat ye that which is good,
And let your soul delight itself in fatness.

"Incline your ear, and come unto Me:
Hear, and your soul shall live;
And I will make an everlasting covenant with you,
Even the sure mercies of David."

Isaiah 55:1-3.

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To Israel the promise was made: "Behold, I have given Him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people. Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee because of the Lord thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for He hath glorified thee." Verses 4, 5.

"I bring near My righteousness; it shall not be far off, and My salvation shall not tarry: and I will place salvation in Zion for Israel My glory." Isaiah 46:13.

In word and in deed the Messiah, during His earthly ministry, was to reveal to mankind the glory of God the Father. Every act of His life, every word spoken, every miracle wrought, was to make known to fallen humanity the infinite love of God.

"O Zion, that bringest good tidings,
Get thee up into the high mountain;
O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings,
Lift up thy voice with strength;
Lift it up, be not afraid;
Say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!
"Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand,
And His arm shall rule for Him:
Behold, His reward is with Him,
And His work before Him.
He shall feed His flock like a shepherd:
He shall gather the lambs with His arm,
And carry them in His bosom,
And shall gently lead those that are with young."
Isaiah 40:9-11.

"And in that day shall the deaf hear the words of the Book,
And the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out
of darkness.

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The meek also shall increase their joy in the Lord,
And the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One
of Israel."

"They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding,
And they that murmured shall learn doctrine."

Isaiah 29: 18, 19, 24.

Thus, through patriarchs and prophets, as well as through types and symbols, God spoke to the world concerning the coming of a Deliverer from sin. A long line of inspired prophecy pointed to the advent of "the Desire of all nations." Haggai 2:7. Even the very place of His birth and the time of His appearance were minutely specified.

The Son of David must be born in David's city. Out of Bethlehem, said the prophet, "shall He come forth . . . that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from the days of eternity." Micah 5:2, margin.

"And thou Bethlehem, land of Judah,
Art in no wise least among the princes of Judah:
For out of thee shall come forth a Governor,
Which shall be Shepherd of My people Israel."

Matthew 2:6, R.V.

The time of the first advent and of some of the chief events clustering about the Saviour's lifework was made known by the angel Gabriel to Daniel. "Seventy weeks," said the angel, "are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy." Daniel 9:24. A day in prophecy

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stands for a year. See Numbers 14:34; Ezekiel 4:6. The seventy weeks, or four hundred and ninety days, represent four hundred and ninety years. A starting point for this period is given: "Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks" (Daniel 9:25), sixty-nine weeks, or four hundred and eighty-three years. The commandment to restore and build Jerusalem, as completed by the decree of Artaxerxes Longimanus, went into effect in the autumn of 457 B.C. See Ezra 6:14; 7:1, 9. From this time four hundred and eighty-three years extend to the autumn of A.D. 27. According to the prophecy, this period was to reach to the Messiah, the Anointed One. In A.D. 27, Jesus at His baptism received the anointing of the Holy Spirit and soon afterward began His ministry. Then the message was proclaimed, "The time is fulfilled." Mark 1:15.

Then, said the angel, "He shall confirm the covenant with many for one week [seven years]." For seven years after the Saviour entered on His ministry, the gospel was to be preached especially to the Jews; for three and a half years by Christ Himself, and afterward by the apostles. "In the midst of the week He shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease." Daniel 9:27. In the spring of A.D. 31, Christ, the true Sacrifice, was offered on Calvary. Then the veil of the temple was rent in twain, showing that the sacredness and significance of the sacrificial service had departed. The time had come for the earthly sacrifice and oblation to cease.

The one week—seven years—ended in A.D. 34. Then by the stoning of Stephen the Jews finally sealed their rejection

of the gospel; the disciples who were scattered abroad by persecution "went everywhere preaching the word" (Acts 8:4); and shortly after, Saul the persecutor was converted and became Paul the apostle to the Gentiles.

The many prophecies concerning the Saviour's advent led the Hebrews to live in an attitude of constant expectancy. Many died in the faith, not having received the promises. But having seen them afar off, they believed and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. From the days of Enoch the promises repeated through patriarchs and prophets had kept alive the hope of His appearing.

Not at first had God revealed the exact time of the first advent; and even when the prophecy of Daniel made this known, not all rightly interpreted the message.

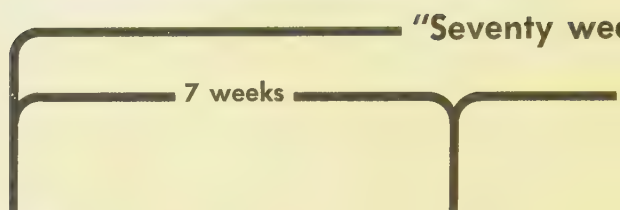
Century after century passed away; finally the voices of the prophets ceased. The hand of the oppressor was heavy upon Israel. As the Jews departed from God, faith grew dim, and hope well-nigh ceased to illuminate the future. The words of the prophets were uncomprehended by many; and those whose faith should have continued strong were ready to exclaim, "The days are prolonged, and every vision faileth." Ezekiel 12:22. But in heaven's council the hour for the coming of Christ had been determined; and "when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, . . . to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." Galatians 4:4, 5.

Lessons must be given to humanity in the language of humanity. The Messenger of the covenant must speak. His voice must be heard in His own temple. He, the author of truth, must separate truth from the chaff of man's utterance,

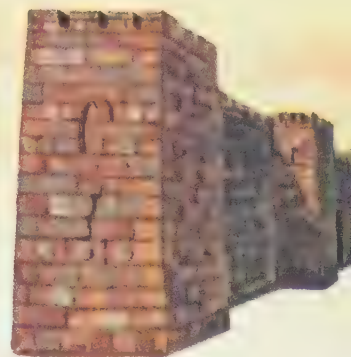
The “seventy weeks” prophecy of Daniel 9:24 spans nearly five centuries, from the rebuilding of Jerusalem after the exile to Israel’s rejection by God as a chosen nation.

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JOE MANISCALCO, ARTIST



457 B.C.
The Decree
to Rebuild
Jerusalem



408 B.C.
Restoration
of Jerusalem
Completed

which had made it of no effect. The principles of God’s government and the plan of redemption must be clearly defined. The lessons of the Old Testament must be fully set before men.

When the Saviour finally appeared “in the likeness of men” (Philippians 2:7), and began His ministry of grace, Satan

are determined upon thy people."

one week



A.D. 27
Baptism
of
Jesus Christ

A.D. 31
Crucifixion
of
Jesus Christ

A.D. 34
Stoning
of
Stephen

could but bruise the heel, while by every act of humiliation or suffering Christ was bruising the head of His adversary. The anguish that sin has brought was poured into the bosom of the Sinless; yet while Christ endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself, He was paying the debt for sinful man and breaking the bondage in which humanity had been

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held. Every pang of anguish, every insult, was working out the deliverance of the race.

Could Satan have induced Christ to yield to a single temptation, could he have led Him by one act or even thought to stain His perfect purity, the prince of darkness would have triumphed over man's Surety and would have gained the whole human family to himself. But while Satan could distress, he could not contaminate. He could cause agony, but not defilement. He made the life of Christ one long scene of conflict and trial, yet with every attack he was losing his hold upon humanity.

In the wilderness of temptation, in the Garden of Gethsemane, and on the cross, our Saviour measured weapons with the prince of darkness. His wounds became the trophies of His victory in behalf of the race. When Christ hung in agony upon the cross, while evil spirits rejoiced and evil men reviled, then indeed His heel was bruised by Satan. But that very act was crushing the serpent's head. Through death He destroyed "him that had the power of death, that is, the devil." Hebrews 2:14. This act decided the destiny of the rebel chief, and made forever sure the plan of salvation. In death He gained the victory over its power; in rising again, He opened the gates of the grave to all His followers. In that last great contest we see fulfilled the prophecy, "It shall bruise thy head, and thou shall bruise his heel." Genesis 3:15.

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is." 1 John 3:2. Our Redeemer has opened the way, so

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that the most sinful, the most needy, the most oppressed and despised, may find access to the Father.

“O Lord, Thou art my God;
I will exalt Thee,
I will praise Thy name;
For Thou hast done wonderful things;
Thy counsels of old are faithfulness and truth.”

Isaiah 25:1.



chapter 59

“The House of Israel”

IN PROCLAIMING the truths of the everlasting gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, God's church on earth today is fulfilling the ancient prophecy, “Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit.” Isaiah 27:6. The followers of Jesus, in co-operation with heavenly intelligences, are rapidly occupying the waste places of the earth; and, as the result of their labors, an abundant fruitage of precious souls is developing. Today, as never before, the dissemination of Bible truth by means of a consecrated church is bringing to the sons of men the benefits foreshadowed centuries ago in the promise to Abraham and to all Israel,—to God's church on earth in every age,—“I will bless thee, . . . and thou shalt be a blessing.” Genesis 12:2.

This promise of blessing should have met fulfillment in large measure during the centuries following the return of the Israelites from the lands of their captivity. It was God's

When the long-awaited Saviour did come, the Jews rejected Him and brought Him before Pilate to be condemned to death.

design that the whole earth be prepared for the first advent of the Christ, even as today the way is preparing for His second coming. At the end of the years of humiliating exile, God graciously gave to His people Israel, through Zechariah, the assurance: "I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the Lord of hosts the holy mountain." And of His people He said, "Behold, . . . I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness." Zechariah 8:3, 7, 8.

These promises were conditional on obedience. The sins that had characterized the Israelites prior to the captivity, were not to be repeated. "Execute true judgment," the Lord exhorted those who were engaged in rebuilding; "and show mercy and compassions every man to his brother: and oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother." "Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbor; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates." Zechariah 7:9, 10; 8:16.

Rich were the rewards, both temporal and spiritual, promised those who should put into practice these principles of righteousness. "The seed shall be prosperous," the Lord declared; "the vine shall give her fruit, and the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things. And it shall come to pass, that as ye were a curse among the heathen, O house of Judah, and house of Israel; so I will save you, and ye shall be a blessing." Zechariah 8:12, 13.

By the Babylonish captivity the Israelites were effectually cured of the worship of graven images. After their return, they gave much attention to religious instruction and to the

study of that which had been written in the book of the law and in the prophets concerning the worship of the true God. The restoration of the temple enabled them to carry out fully the ritual services of the sanctuary. Under the leadership of Zerubbabel, of Ezra, and of Nehemiah they repeatedly covenanted to keep all the commandments and ordinances of Jehovah. The seasons of prosperity that followed gave ample evidence of God's willingness to accept and forgive, and yet with fatal shortsightedness they turned again and again from their glorious destiny and selfishly appropriated to themselves that which would have brought healing and spiritual life to countless multitudes.

This failure to fulfill the divine purpose was very apparent in Malachi's day. Sternly the Lord's messenger dealt with the evils that were robbing Israel of temporal prosperity and spiritual power. In his rebuke against transgressors the prophet spared neither priests nor people. "The burden of the word of the Lord to Israel" through Malachi was that the lessons of the past be not forgotten and that the covenant made by Jehovah with the house of Israel be kept with fidelity. Only by heartfelt repentance could the blessing of God be realized. "I pray you," the prophet pleaded, "beseech God that He will be gracious unto us." Malachi 1:1, 9.

Not by any temporary failure of Israel, however, was the plan of the ages for the redemption of mankind to be frustrated. Those to whom the prophet was speaking might not heed the message given, but the purposes of Jehovah were nevertheless to move steadily forward to their complete fulfillment. "From the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same," the Lord declared through His messenger,

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“My name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto My name, and a pure offering: for My name shall be great among the heathen.” Malachi 1:11.

The covenant of “life and peace” God had made with the sons of Levi—the covenant which, if kept, would have brought untold blessing—the Lord now offered to renew with those who once had been spiritual leaders, but who through transgression had become “contemptible and base before all the people.” Malachi 2:5, 9.

Solemnly evildoers were warned of the day of judgment to come and of Jehovah’s purpose to visit with swift destruction every transgressor. Yet none were left without hope; Malachi’s prophecies of judgment were accompanied by invitations to the impenitent to make their peace with God. “Return unto Me,” the Lord urged; “and I will return unto you.” Malachi 3:7.

It seems as if every heart must respond to such an invitation. The God of heaven is pleading with His erring children to return to Him, that they may again co-operate with Him in carrying forward His work in the earth. The Lord holds out His hand to take the hand of Israel and to help them to the narrow path of self-denial and self-sacrifice, to share with Him the heirship as sons of God. Will they be entreated? Will they discern their only hope?

How sad the record, that in Malachi’s day the Israelites hesitated to yield their proud hearts in prompt and loving obedience and hearty co-operation! Self-vindication is apparent in their response, “Wherein shall we return?”

The Lord reveals to His people one of their special sins.

“Will a man rob God?” He asks. “Yet ye have robbed Me.” Still unconvicted of sin, the disobedient inquire, “Wherein have we robbed Thee?”

Definite indeed is the Lord’s answer: “In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed Me, even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in Mine house, and prove Me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the Lord of hosts. And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the Lord of hosts.” Verses 7-12.

God blesses the work of men’s hands, that they may return to Him His portion. He gives them the sunshine and the rain; He causes vegetation to flourish; He gives health and ability to acquire means. Every blessing comes from His bountiful hand, and He desires men and women to show their gratitude by returning Him a portion in tithes and offerings—in thank offerings, in freewill offerings, in trespass offerings. They are to devote their means to His service, that His vineyard may not remain a barren waste. They are to study what the Lord would do were He in their place. They are to take all difficult matters to Him in prayer. They are to reveal an unselfish interest in the building up of His work in all parts of the world.

Through messages such as those borne by Malachi, the last of the Old Testament prophets, as well as through oppres-

sion from heathen foes, the Israelites finally learned the lesson that true prosperity depends upon obedience to the law of God. But with many of the people, obedience was not the outflow of faith and love. Their motives were selfish. Outward service was rendered as a means of attaining to national greatness. The chosen people did not become the light of the world, but shut themselves away from the world as a safeguard against being seduced into idolatry. The restrictions which God had given, forbidding intermarriage between His people and the heathen, and prohibiting Israel from joining in the idolatrous practices of surrounding nations, were so perverted as to build up a wall of partition between the Israelites and all other peoples, thus shutting from others the very blessings which God had commissioned Israel to give to the world.

At the same time the Jews were, by their sins, separating themselves from God. They were unable to discern the deep spiritual significance of their symbolic service. In their self-righteousness they trusted to their own works, to the sacrifices and ordinances themselves, instead of relying upon the merits of Him to whom all these things pointed. Thus "going about to establish their own righteousness" (Romans 10:3), they built themselves up in a self-sufficient formalism. Wanting the Spirit and grace of God, they tried to make up for the lack by a rigorous observance of religious ceremonies and rites. Not content with the ordinances which God Himself had appointed, they encumbered the divine commands with countless exactions of their own devising. The greater their distance from God, the more rigorous they were in the observance of these forms.

With all these minute and burdensome exactions it was a practical impossibility for the people to keep the law. The great principles of righteousness set forth in the Decalogue, and the glorious truths shadowed in the symbolic service, were alike obscured, buried under a mass of human tradition and enactment. Those who were really desirous of serving God, and who tried to observe the whole law as enjoined by the priests and rulers, groaned under a heavy burden.

As a nation, the people of Israel, while desiring the advent of the Messiah, were so far separated from God in heart and life that they could have no true conception of the character or mission of the promised Redeemer. Instead of desiring redemption from sin, and the glory and peace of holiness, their hearts were fixed upon deliverance from their national foes, and restoration to worldly power. They looked for Messiah to come as a conqueror, to break every yoke, and exalt Israel to dominion over all nations. Thus Satan had succeeded in preparing the hearts of the people to reject the Saviour when He should appear. Their own pride of heart, and their false conceptions of His character and mission, would prevent them from honestly weighing the evidences of His Messiahship.

For more than a thousand years the Jewish people had waited the coming of the promised Saviour. Their brightest hopes had rested upon this event. For a thousand years, in song and prophecy, in temple rite and household prayer, His name had been enshrined; and yet when He came, they did not recognize Him as the Messiah for whom they had so long waited. "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." John 1:11. To their world-loving hearts the Beloved

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of heaven was “as a root out of a dry ground.” In their eyes He had “no form nor comeliness;” they discerned in Him no beauty that they should desire Him. Isaiah 53:2.

The whole life of Jesus of Nazareth among the Jewish people was a reproof to their selfishness, as revealed in their unwillingness to recognize the just claims of the Owner of the vineyard over which they had been placed as husbandmen. They hated His example of truthfulness and piety; and when the final test came, the test which meant obedience unto eternal life or disobedience unto eternal death, they rejected the Holy One of Israel and became responsible for His crucifixion on Calvary's cross.

In the parable of the vineyard, Christ near the close of His earthly ministry called the attention of the Jewish teachers to the rich blessings bestowed upon Israel, and in these showed God's claim to their obedience. Plainly He set before them the glory of God's purpose, which through obedience they might have fulfilled. Withdrawing the veil from the future, He showed how, by failure to fulfill His purpose, the whole nation was forfeiting His blessing and bringing ruin upon itself.

“There was a certain householder,” Christ said, “which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a wine press in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country.” Matthew 21:33.

Thus the Saviour referred to “the vineyard of the Lord of hosts,” which the prophet Isaiah centuries before had declared to be “the house of Israel.” Isaiah 5:7.

“And when the time of the fruit drew near,” Christ continued, the owner of the vineyard “sent his servants to the



husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise. But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him."

Having portrayed before the priests their crowning act of wickedness, Christ now put to them the question, "When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen?" The priests had been following the narrative with deep interest; and without considering the relation of the subject to themselves, they joined with the people in answering, "He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons."

Unwittingly they had pronounced their own doom. Jesus looked upon them, and under His searching gaze they knew that He read the secrets of their hearts. His divinity flashed out before them with unmistakable power. They saw in the husbandmen a picture of themselves, and they involuntarily exclaimed, "God forbid!"

Solemnly and regretfully Christ asked: "Did ye never read in the Scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. And whosoever shall

fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.” Matthew 21:34-44.

Christ would have averted the doom of the Jewish nation if the people had received Him. But envy and jealousy made them implacable. They determined that they would not receive Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah. They rejected the Light of the world, and henceforth their lives were surrounded with darkness as the darkness of midnight. The doom foretold came upon the Jewish nation. Their own fierce passions, uncontrolled, wrought their ruin. In their blind rage they destroyed one another. Their rebellious, stubborn pride brought upon them the wrath of their Roman conquerors. Jerusalem was destroyed, the temple laid in ruins, and its site plowed like a field. The children of Judah perished by the most horrible forms of death. Millions were sold to serve as bondmen in heathen lands.

That which God purposed to do for the world through Israel, the chosen nation, He will finally accomplish through His church on earth today. He has “let out His vineyard unto other husbandmen,” even to His covenant-keeping people, who faithfully “render Him the fruits in their seasons.” Never has the Lord been without true representatives on this earth who have made His interests their own. These witnesses for God are numbered among the spiritual Israel, and to them will be fulfilled all the covenant promises made by Jehovah to His ancient people.

Today the church of God is free to carry forward to completion the divine plan for the salvation of a lost race. For many centuries God’s people suffered a restriction of their liberties. The preaching of the gospel in its purity was pro-

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hibited, and the severest of penalties were visited upon those who dared disobey the mandates of men. As a consequence, the Lord's great moral vineyard was almost wholly unoccupied. The people were deprived of the light of God's word. The darkness of error and superstition threatened to blot out a knowledge of true religion. God's church on earth was as verily in captivity during this long period of relentless persecution as were the children of Israel held captive in Babylon during the period of the exile.

But, thank God, His church is no longer in bondage. To spiritual Israel have been restored the privileges accorded the people of God at the time of their deliverance from Babylon. In every part of the earth, men and women are responding to the Heaven-sent message which John the revelator prophesied would be proclaimed prior to the second coming of Christ: "Fear God, and give glory to Him; for the hour of His judgment is come." Revelation 14:7.

No longer have the hosts of evil power to keep the church captive; for "Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city," which hath "made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication;" and to spiritual Israel is given the message, "Come out of her, My people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues." Verse 8; 18:4. As the captive exiles heeded the message, "Flee out of the midst of Babylon" (Jeremiah 51:6), and were restored to the Land of Promise, so those who fear God today are heeding the message to withdraw from spiritual Babylon, and soon they are to stand as trophies of divine grace in the earth made new, the heavenly Canaan.

In Malachi's day the mocking inquiry of the impenitent,

"THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL"

"Where is the God of judgment?" met with the solemn response: "The Lord . . . shall suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant. . . . But who may abide the day of His coming? and who shall stand when He appeareth? for He is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap: and He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and He shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness. Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord, as in the days of old, and as in former years." Malachi 2:17; 3:1-4.

When the promised Messiah was about to appear, the message of the forerunner of Christ was: Repent, publicans and sinners; repent, Pharisees and Sadducees; "for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Matthew 3:2.



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Today, in the spirit and power of Elias and of John the Baptist, messengers of God's appointment are calling the attention of a judgement-bound world to the solemn events soon to take place in connection with the closing hours of probation and the appearance of Christ Jesus as King of kings and Lord of lords. Soon every man is to be judged for the deeds done in the body. The hour of God's judgment has come, and upon the members of His church on earth rests the solemn responsibility of giving warning to those who are standing as it were on the very brink of eternal ruin. To every human being in the wide world who will give heed must be made plain the principles at stake in the great controversy being waged, principles upon which hang the destinies of all mankind.

In these final hours of probation for the sons of men, when the fate of every soul is so soon to be decided forever, the Lord of heaven and earth expects His church to arouse to action as never before. Those who have been made free in Christ through a knowledge of precious truth, are regarded by the Lord Jesus as His chosen ones, favored above all other people on the face of the earth; and He is counting on them to show forth the praises of Him who hath called them out of darkness into marvelous light. The blessings which are so liberally bestowed are to be communicated to others. The good news of salvation is to go to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people.

In the visions of the prophets of old the Lord of glory was represented as bestowing special light upon His church in the days of darkness and unbelief preceding His second coming. As the Sun of Righteousness, He was to arise upon

His church, “with healing in His wings.” Malachi 4:2. And from every true disciple was to be diffused an influence for life, courage, helpfulness, and true healing.

The coming of Christ will take place in the darkest period of this earth’s history. The days of Noah and of Lot picture the condition of the world just before the coming of the Son of man. The Scriptures, pointing forward to this time, declare that Satan will work with all power and “with all deceivableness of unrighteousness.” 2 Thessalonians 2:9, 10. His working is plainly revealed by the rapidly increasing darkness, the multitudinous errors, heresies, and delusions of these last days. Not only is Satan leading the world captive, but his deceptions are leavening the professed churches of our Lord Jesus Christ. The great apostasy will develop into darkness deep as midnight. To God’s people it will be a night of trial, a night of weeping, a night of persecution for the truth’s sake. But out of that night of darkness God’s light will shine.

He causes “the light to shine out of darkness.” 2 Corinthians 4:6. When “the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep,” “the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.” Genesis 1:2, 3. So in the night of spiritual darkness, God’s word goes forth, “Let there be light.” To His people He says, “Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.” Isaiah 60:1.

“Behold,” says the Scripture, “the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee.” Verse 2. Christ, the outshining of the Father’s glory, came

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to the world as its light. He came to represent God to men, and of Him it is written that He was anointed "with the Holy Ghost and with power," and "went about doing good." Acts 10:38. In the synagogue at Nazareth He said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He hath sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." Luke 4:18, 19. This was the work He commissioned His disciples to do. "Ye are the light of the world," He said. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Matthew 5:14, 16.

This is the work which the prophet Isaiah describes when he says: "Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be thy rereward." Isaiah 58:7, 8.

Thus in the night of spiritual darkness God's glory is to shine forth through His church in lifting up the bowed down and comforting those that mourn.

All around us are heard the wails of a world's sorrow. On every hand are the needy and distressed. It is ours to aid in relieving and softening life's hardships and misery. The wants of the soul only the love of Christ can satisfy. If Christ is abiding in us, our hearts will be full of divine sympathy. The

sealed fountains of earnest, Christlike love will be unsealed.

There are many from whom hope has departed. Bring back the sunshine to them. Many have lost their courage. Speak to them words of cheer. Pray for them. There are those who need the bread of life. Read to them from the word of God. Upon many is a soul sickness which no earthly balm can reach nor physician heal. Pray for these souls. Bring them to Jesus. Tell them that there is a balm in Gilead and a Physician there.

Light is a blessing, a universal blessing, pouring forth its treasures on a world unthankful, unholy, demoralized. So it is with the light of the Sun of Righteousness. The whole earth, wrapped as it is in the darkness of sin and sorrow and pain, is to be lighted with the knowledge of God's love. From no sect, rank, or class of people is the light shining from heaven's throne to be excluded.

The message of hope and mercy is to be carried to the ends of the earth. Whosoever will, may reach forth and take hold of God's strength and make peace with Him, and he shall make peace. No longer are the heathen to be wrapped in midnight darkness. The gloom is to disappear before the bright beams of the Sun of Righteousness.

Christ has made every provision that His church shall be a transformed body, illumined with the Light of the world, possessing the glory of Immanuel. It is His purpose that every Christian shall be surrounded with a spiritual atmosphere of light and peace. He desires that we shall reveal His own joy in our lives.

“Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.” Isaiah 60:1. Christ is coming with

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power and great glory. He is coming with His own glory and with the glory of the Father. And the holy angels will attend Him on His way. While all the world is plunged in darkness, there will be light in every dwelling of the saints. They will catch the first light of His second appearing. The unsullied light will shine from His splendor, and Christ the Redeemer will be admired by all who have served Him. While the wicked flee, Christ's followers will rejoice in His presence.

Then it is that the redeemed from among men will receive their promised inheritance. Thus God's purpose for Israel will meet with literal fulfillment. That which God purposes, man is powerless to disannul. Even amid the working of evil, God's purposes have been moving steadily forward to their accomplishment. It was thus with the house of Israel throughout the history of the divided monarchy; it is thus with spiritual Israel today.

The seer of Patmos, looking down through the ages to the time of this restoration of Israel in the earth made new, testified:

"I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.

"And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts ["living creatures," R.V.], and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshiped God, saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and

thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, be unto our God forever and ever."

"And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to Him." "He is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with Him are called, and chosen, and faithful." Revelation 7:9-12; 19:6, 7; 17:14.

Thy people also shall be
all righteous:
They shall inherit the
land forever,
The branch of My
planting,
The work of My hands,
That I may be glorified

Isaiah 60:21



chapter 60

Visions of Future Glory

IN THE darkest days of her long conflict with evil, the church of God has been given revelations of the eternal purpose of Jehovah. His people have been permitted to look beyond the trials of the present to the triumphs of the future, when, the warfare having been accomplished, the redeemed will enter into possession of the promised land. These visions of future glory, scenes pictured by the hand of God, should be dear to His church today, when the controversy of the ages is rapidly closing and the promised blessings are soon to be realized in all their fullness.

Many were the messages of comfort given the church by the prophets of old. "Comfort ye, comfort ye My people" (Isaiah 40:1), was Isaiah's commission from God; and with the commission were given wonderful visions that have been the believers' hope and joy through all the centuries that have followed. Despised of men, persecuted, forsaken, God's children in every age have nevertheless been sustained by His

Through darkest days of conflict the promises of God, like a blazing torch, have cheered believers on to victory.

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sure promises. By faith they have looked forward to the time when He will fulfill to His church the assurance, "I will make thee an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations." Isaiah 60:15.

Often the church militant is called upon to suffer trial and affliction; for not without severe conflict is the church to triumph. "The bread of adversity," "the water of affliction" (Isaiah 30:20), these are the common lot of all; but none who put their trust in the One mighty to deliver will be utterly overwhelmed. "Thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and He that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art Mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. Since thou wast precious in My sight, thou hast been honorable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life." Isaiah 43:1-4.

There is forgiveness with God; there is acceptance full and free through the merits of Jesus, our crucified and risen Lord. Isaiah heard the Lord declaring to His chosen ones: "I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for Mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins. Put Me in remembrance: let us plead together: declare thou, that thou mayest be justified." "Thou shalt know that I the Lord am thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob." Verses 25, 26; 60:16.

"The rebuke of His people shall He take away," the prophet declared. "They shall call them, The holy people, The redeemed of the Lord." He hath appointed "to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified."

"Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion;
Put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the Holy City:
For henceforth there shall no more come unto thee the
uncircumcised and the unclean.

"Shake thyself from the dust;
Arise, and sit down, O Jerusalem:
Loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter
of Zion."

"O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted,
Behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colors,
And lay thy foundations with sapphires.

"And I will make thy windows of agates,
And thy gates of carbuncles,
And all thy borders of pleasant stones.

"And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord;
And great shall be the peace of thy children.
In righteousness shalt thou be established:

"Thou shalt be far from oppression; for thou shalt not fear:
And from terror; for it shall not come near thee.
Behold, they shall surely gather together, but not by Me:
Whosoever shall gather together against thee shall fall
for thy sake. . . .

"No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper;

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And every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment
thou shalt condemn.

This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord,
And their righteousness is of Me, saith the Lord."

Isaiah 25:8; 62:12; 61:3; 52:1, 2; 54:11-17.

Clad in the armor of Christ's righteousness, the church is to enter upon her final conflict. "Fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners" (Song of Solomon 6:10), she is to go forth into all the world, conquering and to conquer.

The darkest hour of the church's struggle with the powers of evil is that which immediately precedes the day of her final deliverance. But none who trust in God need fear; for "when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall," God will be to His church "a refuge from the storm." Isaiah 25:4.

In that day only the righteous are promised deliverance. "The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings? He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil; he shall dwell on high: his place of defense shall be the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure." Isaiah 33:14-16.

The word of the Lord to His faithful ones is: "Come, My people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until

the indignation be overpast. For, behold, the Lord cometh out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity." Isaiah 26:20, 21.

In visions of the great judgment day the inspired messengers of Jehovah were given glimpses of the consternation of those unprepared to meet their Lord in peace.

"Behold, the Lord maketh the earth empty, and maketh it waste, and turneth it upside down, and scattereth abroad the inhabitants thereof; . . . because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore hath the curse devoured the earth, and they that dwell therein are desolate. . . . The mirth of tabrets ceaseth, the noise of them that rejoice endeth, the joy of the harp ceaseth." Isaiah 24:1-8.

"Alas for the day! for the day of the Lord is at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come. . . . The seed is rotten under their clods, the garners are laid desolate, the barns are broken down; for the corn is withered. How do the beasts groan! the herds of cattle are perplexed, because they have no pasture; yea, the flocks of sheep are made desolate." "The vine is dried up, and the fig tree languisheth; the pomegranate tree, the palm tree also, and the apple tree, even all the trees of the field, are withered: because joy is withered away from the sons of men." Joel 1:15-18, 12.

"I am pained at my very heart," Jeremiah exclaims as he beholds the desolations wrought during the closing scenes of earth's history. "I cannot hold my peace, because thou hast heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war. Destruction upon destruction is cried; for the whole land is spoiled." Jeremiah 4:19, 20.

PROPHETS AND KINGS

“The loftiness of man shall be bowed down,” declares Isaiah of the day of God’s vengeance, “and the haughtiness of men shall be made low: and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day. And the idols He shall utterly abolish. . . . In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which they made each one for himself to worship, to the moles and to the bats; to go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the tops of the ragged rocks, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of His majesty, when He ariseth to shake terribly the earth.” Isaiah 2:17-21.

Of those times of transition, when the pride of man shall be laid low, Jeremiah testifies: “I beheld the earth, and, lo, it was without form, and void; and the heavens, and they had no light. I beheld the mountains, and, lo, they trembled, and all the hills moved lightly. I beheld, and, lo, there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens were fled. I beheld, and, lo, the fruitful place was a wilderness, and all the cities thereof were broken down.” “Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob’s trouble; but he shall be saved out of it.” Jeremiah 4:23-26; 30:7.

The day of wrath to the enemies of God is the day of final deliverance to His church. The prophet declares:

“Strengthen ye the weak hands,
And confirm the feeble knees.
Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not:
Behold, your God will come with vengeance,
Even God with a recompense;
He will come and save you.”

“He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of His

people shall He take away from off all the earth: for the Lord hath spoken it." Isaiah 35:3, 4; 25:8. And as the prophet beholds the Lord of glory descending from heaven, with all the holy angels, to gather the remnant church from among the nations of earth, he hears the waiting ones unite in the exultant cry:

"Lo, this is our God;
We have waited for Him,
And He will save us:
This is the Lord;
We have waited for Him,
We will be glad and rejoice
in His salvation."
Isaiah 25:9.

The voice of the Son of God is heard calling forth the sleeping saints, and as the prophet beholds them coming from the prison house of death, he exclaims, "Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead."

"Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
And the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.
Then shall the lame man leap as an hart,
And the tongue of the dumb sing."
Isaiah 26:19; 35:5, 6.

In the visions of the prophet, those who have triumphed over sin and the grave are now seen happy in the presence of their Maker, talking freely with Him as man talked with God in the beginning. "Be ye glad," the Lord bids them, "and rejoice forever in that which I create: for, behold, I create



Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in My people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying." "The inhabitant shall not say, I am sick: the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity."

"In the wilderness shall waters break out,
And streams in the desert.

And the parched ground shall become a pool,
And the thirsty land springs of water."

"Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree,
And instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree."

"And an highway shall be there, and a way,
And it shall be called The way of holiness;
The unclean shall not pass over it;
But it shall be for those:

The wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein."

"Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins." Isaiah 65:18, 19; 33:24; 35:6, 7; 55:13; 35:8; 40:2.

As the prophet beholds the redeemed dwelling in the City of God, free from sin and from all marks of the curse, in rapture he exclaims, "Rejoice ye with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all ye that love her: rejoice for joy with her."

"Violence shall no more be heard in thy land,
Wasting nor destruction within thy borders;
But thou shalt call thy walls Salvation,
And thy gates Praise.

"The sun shall be no more thy light by day;
Neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee:
But the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light,
And thy God thy glory.

Many promises made to ancient Israel
will be fulfilled in the new earth
to spiritual Israel of all ages.

© P. P. P. A.

CLYDE PROVONSHA, ARTIST

PROPHETS AND KINGS

“Thy sun shall no more go down;
Neither shall thy moon withdraw itself:
For the Lord shall be thine everlasting light,
And the days of thy mourning shall be ended.

“Thy people also shall be all righteous:
They shall inherit the land forever,
The branch of My planting,
The work of My hands,
That I may be glorified.”

Isaiah 66:10; 60:18-21.

The prophet caught the sound of music there, and song, such music and song as, save in the visions of God, no mortal ear has heard or mind conceived. “The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.” “Joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody.” “As well the singers as the players on instruments shall be there.” “They shall lift up their voice, they shall sing for the majesty of the Lord.” Isaiah 35:10; 51:3; Psalm 87:7; Isaiah 24:14.

In the earth made new, the redeemed will engage in the occupations and pleasures that brought happiness to Adam and Eve in the beginning. The Eden life will be lived, the life in garden and field. “They shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of My people, and Mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands.” Isaiah 65:21, 22.

There every power will be developed, every capability increased. The grandest enterprises will be carried forward,

the loftiest aspirations will be reached, the highest ambitions realized. And still there will appear new heights to surmount, new wonders to admire, new truths to comprehend, fresh objects of study to call forth the powers of body and mind and soul.

The prophets to whom these great scenes were revealed longed to understand their full import. They "inquired and searched diligently: . . . searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify. . . . Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you." 1 Peter 1:10-12.

To us who are standing on the very verge of their fulfillment, of what deep moment, what living interest, are these delineations of the things to come—events for which, since our first parents turned their steps from Eden, God's children have watched and waited, longed and prayed!

Fellow pilgrim, we are still amid the shadows and turmoil of earthly activities; but soon our Saviour is to appear to bring deliverance and rest. Let us by faith behold the blessed hereafter as pictured by the hand of God. He who died for the sins of the world is opening wide the gates of Paradise to all who believe on Him. Soon the battle will have been fought, the victory won. Soon we shall see Him in whom our hopes of eternal life are centered. And in His presence the trials and sufferings of this life will seem as nothingness. The former things "shall not be remembered, nor come into mind." "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the prom-

ise. For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry." "Israel shall be saved . . . with an everlasting salvation: ye shall not be ashamed nor confounded world without end." Isaiah 65:17; Hebrews 10:35-37; Isaiah 45:17.

Look up, look up, and let your faith continually increase. Let this faith guide you along the narrow path that leads through the gates of the city into the great beyond, the wide, unbounded future of glory that is for the redeemed. "Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh." James 5:7, 8.

The nations of the saved will know no other law than the law of heaven. All will be a happy, united family, clothed with the garments of praise and thanksgiving. Over the scene the morning stars will sing together, and the sons of God will shout for joy, while God and Christ will unite in proclaiming, "There shall be no more sin, neither shall there be any more death."

"And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before Me, saith the Lord." "The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together." "The Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations." "In that day shall the Lord of hosts be for a crown of glory, and for a diadem of beauty, unto the residue of His people."

"The Lord shall comfort Zion: He will comfort all her waste places; and He will make her wilderness like Eden,

VISIONS OF FUTURE GLORY

and her desert like the garden of the Lord." "The glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon." "Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called My Delight, and thy land Beulah. . . . As the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee." Isaiah 66:23; 40:5; 61:11; 28:5; 51:3; 35:2; 62:4, 5, margin.

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***I**s God active on earth? For an answer, look to this period of Jewish history when He brings low the nation He once exalted. Read Daniel's prophecies that describe God's continuing control of politics. You will discover how the prosperity of individuals and nations is linked with their obedience to God.*

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